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JAMES BOSWELL
The Prince of Biographers

BIOGRAPHY:
THE LITERATURE
OF PERSONALITY

By James C. Johnston
With an Introduction by
Gamaliel Bradford &
Eight Unusual Illustrations



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To

GAMALIEL BRADFORD

WHOSE HIGH IDEALS OF THE ART OF BIOGRAPHY
AND WHOSE KINDLY PERSONAL INTEREST
AND CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM
HAVE BEEN MY GREATEST
INSPIRATION

Here my life's struggling story I make plain
To thank the God of Nature, who has still
Tended the soul He gave me. By His will,
Diverse and high my deeds—and I remain.
My cruel fate hath warr'd with me in vain:
Life, glory, worth, and all unmeasur'd skill,
Beauty and grace, themselves in me fulfil,
That many I surpass, and to the best attain.
But man's frail thoughts fly 'fore the wind like sand.
Now know I all the waste, and sorely blame
The precious time I have in trifles spent.
Yet, since remorse is vain, I'll be content.
Welcome I mount, as Welcome down I came
Into the flower of this good Tuscan land.

*Prefatory Sonnet and Declaration
Introducing Benvenuto Cellini's Memoirs*

PREFACE

THE enviable biographical tradition which the French enjoy may be traced, in no small measure, to the inspiration of such oft-repeated declarations as that of Jacques Amyot, who, as early as the middle of the sixteenth century, wrote:

There is neither picture, nor image of marble, nor sumptuous sepulchre, can match the durability of an eloquent biography.

The quick discernment of the fellow-countrymen of Madame de Sévigné, Rousseau, and Eugénie de Guérin has been abundantly evidenced in modern times by a number of other nations, so far as producing various types of biography is concerned; but there is little evidence in any quarter of a desire to establish and make known dependable criteria for the proper estimation of the art of life-writing. With us, so far as biography is concerned, only the traditions of unliterary ages appear to have

any great force. Yet, there never was a situation in the whole domain of letters, perhaps, when there was a greater need for looking closely at a literary form than we now have in the case of biography.

Biography, in actual fact, is not an old art as a popular form of expression; but it has become in our day exceedingly complex. And this complexity, with the present confused standards, or the more general lack of standards, raises many obstacles to its highest appreciation and greatest possible enjoyment, except among the few who have made it an object of close study. The wide vogue it has at present is due to its inherent appeal; but the popularity it possesses, despite any systematic effort to render it more intelligible and acceptable, is merely suggestive of the rich returns possible under the right sort of guidance.

The biographer, as well as the general reader, is more deeply concerned than at first thought he might realize in the proper organization of the materials of biography, in establishing legitimate biographical aims, and in bringing about some definite understanding of the ethical

PREFACE

principles involved in his art. The vagueness in the minds of even some of the best qualified critics as to such fundamental matters as definition and classification necessitates the acceptance of the standards furnished by other better organized departments, such as history, drama, or fiction; this reacts unfavorably upon both biographer and reader. So far as the general reader is concerned, an estimate is usually a matter of the weight of the individual critic's name, there being virtually no standards available other than such biographies as have received the vague endorsement of "adequate."

In the following outline survey of biographical literature I am simply proposing, therefore, that what the best critics and biographers know of the art of life-writing be made accessible to a wider group of students of letters. In doing this I am presenting certain aspects of the subject to show that life-writing is fundamentally "The Literature of Personality." This element distinguishes it from all other departments of expression, for in no other literary form is personality so completely the determining factor. But if there is such a thing as the literature of

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travel literature, into the narrow subject of biography; but the recognition of the term as including all forms of *life-writing* appears to me justifiable; and even travel-literature is undoubtedly a type of life-writing, with personality more or less prominent.

Proper acknowledgment has been made at the several places where I have introduced quotations.

JAMES C. JOHNSTON

Harrisonburg, Virginia

March 3, 1927

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BIOGRAPHY

GAMALIEL BRADFORD

EVERY aspect of human interest and effort is the field of biography and it may be said that biography is the key to them all. In politics, in business, in education, in industry: in short, in all work and all play, everything comes back to the individual; and it is the province of biography to reveal, to explain, to classify the individual, or, if this is impossible, with any final result, at least to suggest and to indicate in that direction.

But the very universality of biography diffuses it too much and renders discrimination difficult. In this book Professor Johnston aims to distinguish and to systematize. He endeavors to elucidate the purpose of biography, to explain and analyze its methods, and to classify its numerous manifestations.

The basis of biography is the identity of human life and human nature. If we were all

fundamentally different, we should take little interest in each other's actions and motives, because we should be quite incapable of entering into them and understanding them. With all the superficial diversity, human beings at large are like each other. The same passions drive us, the same fears restrain us, the same long, undying ambitions urge us on to ever renewed achievement, and the same fatal weariness and despair at times overcome us, only to give place to hope reborn and the ever varied, unfailing effort to accomplish something, often we know not what. It is this unity of motive and of interest that makes us eager to know all we can of the lives of others, for by learning the nature of their efforts and impulses we come better to understand our own, and also to appreciate the interworking of our lives with theirs.

After grasping this fundamental identity of humanity, we then come to understand the interest of the superficial differences. If all men were different we should not care to study them, nor should we if they were all absolutely alike. There is the common basis of general traits of character, but these traits are modified

in every particular case with an infinite play of complexity which makes the study of them as endlessly difficult as it is fascinating.

For it is a common error to suppose that biography is an easy form of literary work, which anybody can indulge in without preliminary thought or training. In reality, the difficulties are immense, and no one altogether overcomes them. There are the subjective difficulties. The biographer is apt to be misled by all sorts of prejudices and preconceptions, ethical, political, social, and personal. He is almost sure to take a liking to his subject, or a disliking, such as he can hardly explain, and these feelings will distort and color his portrayal. The subtle, remote, far-working associations of prejudice can only be appreciated when one has long toiled and struggled in the netting midst of them. Again, there are the objective difficulties. The biographer has to work with materials. He rarely has a personal acquaintance with his subject, and when he has such, he is most of all apt to go astray. Without the personal acquaintance, he has to rely upon the reports of others, or upon the printed words of others, or

of the subject himself. Only when one has worked much with indirect records does one thoroughly appreciate the utter unreliability of them. Even when one has a man's own written words, there are incredible difficulties. Such words are not always sincere, even in intention. When they are most so, they are often misleading; and the task of interpreting them is one that requires infinite tact, judgment, and knowledge of the world and of the human heart.

The statement of these difficulties and the proper appreciation of them are enough to show that biography is, or should be, a fine art, one requiring and deserving long preparation, systematic training, and careful thought. Unfortunately, a large number of biographies are written by persons who are but ill-equipped in all these respects. Personal familiarity and an intimate family affection, in reality serious biographical drawbacks, are often regarded as prime qualifications, and thus very important biographical undertakings are ruined with the best intentions.

The art of the biographer shows perhaps

most of all in structure and handling. Here again the inexpert are inclined to think that all that is necessary is to pick up facts and set them down. But this gets us only a very little way. The skilled biographer reflects long upon the whole treatment of his subject before he writes a word. He gets the larger perspective of the character he is dealing with, its main significance to the world, the effect of climax in various episodes, the balanced relation and proportion of different traits. He selects his materials, winnows them with the nicest care, so that he may use only what bears directly upon the point he has to illustrate, and may not undermine the reader's patience with the superfluous or otiose. He uses all subordinate incidents and characters in such a way, and only in such a way, as to bring out the main, essential lines which are most of all needed to make his final result a perfect and enduring picture. And if it be said that very little biography complies with these requirements, so much the worse for the biographers and for biography as they practice it. But it deserves, at its best, to be treated like the portrait-painting of Titian or Velas-

quez, and some of us believe it is on the way to get such treatment sooner or later.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of biography, and especially of the current interest in it, is its actual and possible importance as an element of education. In this regard too much stress cannot be laid upon the efforts of Professor Ambrose White Vernon, who, first at Carleton College and now at Dartmouth, has built up the only academic departments of biography in the country, perhaps in the world. Every one admits that we are at sea as to the problem of general education. The old ideal of a liberal education for every one has gone forever—and what are we to put in the place of it? It is not easy to see. But surely at least a clue may be found in the possibilities of human individuality. Nothing interests young people, or old ones, or all men and women, so much as other men and women. The study of literature, the study of science, the study of philosophy, all gain tenfold in significance when they are made human. Now biography introduces just this element of humanity into all phases of intellectual life. May it not be possible to develop

biographical studies as a central element of instruction and inspiration, not only in higher groups, but even in the secondary schools? Children much below these respond first of all to the stories of what has been done by men and women such as they themselves wish to be, and therefore what may be done again.

Professor Johnston is a pioneer in the elucidation of an immensely complicated and largely unexplored subject. Others will take his work as a basis and no doubt differentiate and systematize more fully. But those interested in biography will find in his pages an ample accumulation of material and an earnest and enthusiastic discussion of the manifold aspects in which a matter of such universal and also of such timely interest can present itself.

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INTRODUCTION

HORATIO, I AM DEAD;
THOU LIVEST; REPORT ME AND MY CAUSE ARIGHT
TO THE UNSATISFIED.

—*Hamlet*, Act V, Scene 2.

INTRODUCTION

LIFE-WRITING AND LITERARY COMPLACENCY

IT is not merely a thin voice here and there that credits biographers with being hilarious liars; even the publisher's blurb, however artfully worded, cannot always allay a certain persistent suspicion that we have here another "story with a purpose." Indeed, the usually dispassionate Edmund Gosse declares with no little heat: "Certain fashionable biographies of the present day deserve no other comment than the word 'Lie' printed in bold letters across the title-page." Such an unfavorable tradition, it appears, has gathered about biography-writing in some quarters that a note of sincerity is not infrequently the cause of special comment; and life-stories of high ethical standards are regarded as quite exceptional.

Yet, biography-reading has grown steadily in favor; any life-story, from that of P. T. Barnum or John L. Sullivan to such a work as Amy

Lowell's "Life of John Keats" or the latest literary portrait of a saint, appearing to serve the purpose equally well. In the publishers' records for 1925, biography alone among the principal departments of publications showed an increase in the number of works over the preceding year. While the demand for biographical works of all kinds has never before been so general, and the bookmaker's art in presenting them so skilfully exercised, the indiscriminate choice of subjects and the almost absolute abandon in the handling of biographical material reflect seriously upon the intelligence of modern readers. The unconsciously illuminating remark of Benvenuto Cellini, in extricating himself from one of his numerous difficulties, "bethinking me first of my safety and next of my honor," perhaps characterizes no less clearly many of our recent biographers, whose sole conception of life-writing is "the story with an appeal," than it does the moral attitude of the Italian memoir-writer. That a biography should be popular appears all too frequently to be of far greater moment than that it should embody correct life-writing principles.

The intimate-portrait mania, the biographical vogue at present, furnishes too ready an opportunity in this field to gratify the eager craving for a new sensation so evident in the fields of fiction and the drama. The announcement of a forthcoming volume, "The Mirrors" of Anybody or Anything, offering a feast of inner-circle news, any sort of revelation of state or stage secrets of a picturesque character, never fails to bring its thrill even to the *blasé* reader who boasts an exclusive regard for several of our more glaring syndicated fiction magazines. If the details are but stark enough, the portrait will be pronounced "a life-like picture." But what dull stuff the journals of Amiel and Eugénie de Guérin must be to those who have found in these "mirrors" a reflection of life! The memoir-rage of the Napoleonic era is veritably tame in comparison with our insistent desire to know the "things that should not be told."

Yet the development of biography into the literary portrait is both a legitimate and natural trend for life-writing to take, and in the hands of competent biographers is replete with possi-

bilities for the art itself and for its admirers. Gamaliel Bradford and Strachey, for example, as well as two or three of the more recent French biographers, have given illustrations of the perfection to which this type of life-writing may be carried; but, unfortunately, too many readers of biography have such confused notions of the art that they are unable to distinguish between a psychographic masterpiece and a jumble of sensational details that nowhere touch the soul of the subject. Among his "Damaged Souls," for example, Mr. Bradford presents a veritable portrait of Aaron Burr, through which reverberates the admirable sentence uttered by Burr in a speech to the Senate: "On full investigation it will be discovered that there is scarce a departure from order but leads to or is indissolubly connected with a departure from morality"; as indeed the inconsistency between the outer facts of his life and the man's real being, his essential self, which his daughter Theodosia knew and loved, must have hauntingly arisen from time to time in Burr's own mind. In the Aaron Burr of Mr. Bradford we see a soul laid bare; but in a more recent effort

to picture this subject in one of our better magazines we have a mere story of the generally known incidents of the man's life, devoted principally to those more salacious facts which his enemies have always found keen delight in keeping to the front. The one is artistic, the other merely artful.

There is little wonder, then, that a recent magazine writer sums up his conclusions as to the reasons for the popularity of various forms of biography as "idle, vulgar curiosity." While such a view, of course, in no way accounts for the enthusiasm for biographical writings of all sorts among the more discriminating, it does at least force upon our attention the fact that no other motive than that of curiosity, however characterized, is so often brought to the notice of the reader of current biographical criticism. Perhaps no little of the biography of some of our widely read magazines deliberately emphasizes this element of appeal; the "Real Anybody" or the "True So-and-So," with an accompanying suggestion that here we have vitally important but hitherto suppressed facts "at last presented," is so alluring that the average

reader does not give himself time to think whether or not this very material was originally suppressed because it had no bearing upon the essential character of the subject.

But where can the reader of biography get any standards, unless he is in a position to make a much more prolonged and painstaking study of innumerable biographies and widely scattered fragments of criticism than is possible for any but a specialist in this field? There are a few limited discussions of certain aspects of biography, most of them admirable as far as they go, but there is not, to my knowledge, a single consideration of the subject in its entirety such as, in its growing appeal to the better class of readers, biography is now demanding. The complacent acceptance of traditional notions, however, bids fair to be soon a thing of the past if there is anything like a reasonable response to the obviously growing desire on the part of readers for something more than an opinion as to relative values in many matters relating to biography.

Too many critical estimates of individual biographies, indeed, bear the almost inevitable

note of finality, such as the unqualified positiveness of "The London Times" in declaring Vallerey-Radot's "Life of Pasteur" "the greatest biography of our age." Here an individual's enthusiasm is confused with supposedly recognized criteria. Such statements, capable of duplication with only a change of title in issue after issue of almost any literary journal, assume either a perfected system of biographical ethics and technique or the complete validity of a purely impressionistic view. Even the easily satisfied reader, in the absence of any standards by which such a conclusion is reached as that of the "Times" critic, may insist upon the right to his own impression and decline to accept the judgment of the English admirer of the French biographer. Whatever the merits of the critic's opinion may be, in the present confused state of biographical standards, the matter must rest as simply a conflict of opinion.

Maurois attempts a portrait of Shelley, and immediately "Ariel" is declared the definitive biography of the poet. Even the critics appear to forget that such confident assurances have been made of every effort to depict the color-

able life of Shelley. However well a background is painted for the special ironic stressing of the moral shortcomings of the man—admirable enough for the purpose of fiction—a story that nowhere accounts for the unique quality of his work cannot be regarded as an adequate biography of the poet. Other literary meteors, from Marlowe to Poe, have had similar oblique pictures painted of them, but usually with a franker admission of fictional intent. The point is not one of interest—Maurois's interpretation is fascinating enough, both in material and style—but, rather, is this Shelley? The lover of Shelley's ethereal verse, I am sure, does not feel that the definitive life-story of the author of "The Sensitive Plant" has yet appeared; though, despite the tradition that some lives are abiographic, it will when the relationship of the biographer to his subject is properly understood.

All biography, as, indeed, any biography of some people, is doubtless to some readers more or less interesting; hence, criticism must be intelligently directed effort to make a proper appraisal of the biographical product in matters

of ethics and art, rather than the intrinsic appeal of its material. The inherent charm of Pasteur's life and achievements, for instance, would likely make any sort of story of his career readable; yet, the most pleasing material, if improperly handled, would not constitute a biography that reaches the standards of an adequate life-story. Even "that awful Mrs. Peck," as she has been maliciously called by those who were apparently jealous of her influence with Woodrow Wilson, can give an interesting account of the late War President, but the most commercialized reviewer could hardly bring himself to the point of calling her sensational tales real biography.

A recent review of Steuart's "Robert Louis Stevenson" appeared under the title, all too common both in attempts at life-writing and painfully inadequate critical estimates, of "The Real Stevenson at Last." This biography constitutes in effect, both in the opinion of the reviewer and in the aim of the author, a sort of reply to Balfour's "Life of Stevenson." It represents the amiability of Mr. Balfour, who has been charged with having suppressed "a very

unedifying but most attractive Stevenson in favor of the heroic gentleman who wrote Vailima prayers and abounded in lay sermons." As the questionable contribution of Mr. Steuart is nothing more than an unreserved acceptance of a casual remark of Stevenson, that "it is never safe to suppress what is true," this apparently proper maxim for a biographer, if understood in its relation to interpretative biography, might have admirably supplemented Balfour's alleged idealization; but both the biographer and his reviewer unfortunately conceive the term "real" as necessarily having the usual biographical associations of "objectionable" and "immoral." When the specially selected incidents that support the thesis of the biographer in this case appear to have little to do with Stevenson's character, we are not surprised to find Sir Sidney Colvin, himself a biographer of Stevenson and a life-long friend, resentfully declaring that he cannot accept it as an adequate biography of Stevenson, and that as a whole it is very offensive.

There can be no ending of biographical travesties so long as biographers regard themselves

in the light of creators rather than compilers, and critics feel that they are interpreters wholly free to exercise their function as whim may direct. We may not be so much surprised to find exactly antithetical views of the character of Anne Boleyn in Sergeant's and MacLaurin's stories of the mother of Queen Elizabeth; but when positive critical endorsements are given of each, with the air of unchallengeable right to individual opinion, we wonder at the reading public's acquiescence in the contradictions and confusions that characterize this particular phase of literature. Are there so few standards by which biography may be gaged? Are there no criteria to which biographers and their critics recognize an obligation? Or is the zeal of biography only a phase of the love of a good story? If so, then there is some justification for the cynic's view—

That glory has long made the sages smile;

'Tis something, nothing, words, illusions, wind—
Depending more upon the historian's style

Than on the name a person leaves behind.

The utter complacency of even biography enthusiasts toward what so eminent an authority

as Lytton Strachey calls "the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing," can, perhaps, be explained only on the grounds that too few readers have anything more than the ancient conception of biography as a *curriculum vitæ*; and so, when they find it padded a little, even by the rankest journalistic methods, they believe they have a real biography. Yet, how can the situation be other than it is? While, indeed, there is no other department of literature in which the ordinary reader has so small a share of the "inner view," very little effort has been made by either biographers or their critics to formulate other than an occasional standard by which works falling under the head of life-writing may be properly judged.

But the blight of deliberate journalizing in practically all forms of biography-writing raises the question as to how long the present high enthusiasm for this type of reading can be maintained. There must inevitably be a reaction when it is realized that natural and legitimate interests in biography are being utilized to foist upon the reading world innumerable cheap and

tawdry stories that purport to be genuine life-writing. Here and there we are already finding a sensitiveness to the situation; we need only a better appreciation of the essential principles of the art to make this sensitiveness more general. Unfortunately for all concerned, moreover, whether the biographer exemplifies merely the padded chronology type of story or is effectively presenting the character and personality of his subject, he is apt to find pretty much the same critical reward: indiscriminate praise, more or less obviously serving an end, with the retelling of some of the events of the life of the subject, and perhaps a correction or two relating to minor matters in the narration of facts. But awakening interest in the biographer and his technique bids fair to produce before long a reasonably well formulated statement of the duties of the biographer and his critic such as will put the properly interested reader in a position less subject to the confusion that now prevails.

Apart from the general method by which biographical material may be treated, practically every important undertaking in this field raises

a host of questions of ethics in the minds of the more observant readers. To what extent, for example, does the biographer have the privilege of omitting certain biographical material? Who has set the limit of compromising in life-writing? Is the first obligation in biography to the living or to the dead? To what extent should the biographer be controlled by the wishes of the surviving members of the family of the subject? Is there any legitimate degree in which the biographer may intrude himself upon the attention of the reader? Really, which of these questions, if any, are debatable? Though there may be an understanding among reputable critics as to these matters, where can the mere reader acquaint himself with their conclusions? But we might ask further question as to whether biographers and their critics are in agreement on these points. Some statement of methods and principles might at least be made to disabuse the public mind of the notion that all one needs for a biography are the facts of the subject's life.

When Phillips Brooks assured his readers of

a generation ago that he would rather write a great biography than a great book of any other kind, there must have been in his mind a keen appreciation of the requirements for the task. Effective handling of biographical material, indeed, requires in the nature of the task some of the rarest of literary qualities. The biographer, if he is true to the ideals of really great biography, must not only possess the vision and generalizing power of a superb historian, but he must be equipped with a high degree of analytical skill; and, perhaps above all, in the function of a critic of the materials at his disposal, he must appreciate what Matthew Arnold really meant by "the preservation of the best that has been thought and done" and be able to apply it to the life of the individual. In this way alone can the biographer leave the all-important impression of justice, impartiality, and truth upon the mind of the reader.

Such elements of technique as purpose, scope, arrangement, and style will of course lay a heavy hand on the biographer and constantly remind him that, while the supply of subjects

is inexhaustible, the number of heaven-born biographers is limited; yet, the main business of biography is, as Sidney Lee has so well set forth, to transmit *personality*. But personality is not held as a very exact term by most people; like the life of which it is an expression, it is not capable of definition. By general agreement, however, character values deal with those things that exhibit the individual's purpose and action, and, of course, as such have a large place in any adequate presentation of a life; but the charm of real life-writing consists in the subtle something which has more to do with the individual's *manner of living and tastes for life*, to which we apply the term "personality." This is not a dictionary definition; but even the dictionary would hardly help us in pointing out in a few words "that which constitutes distinction of person." At any rate, herein lies the true province of biography, in all its varied forms: indeed, centered upon temperament, individuality, character, personality—the frequently recurring terms in any discussion of genuine biography, particularly that which we are sometimes inclined to term "the new biog-

raphy"—the real objective of the biographer becomes that of writing not merely the story of a life, but rather of *life-writing*.

Notwithstanding the singleness of purpose that must necessarily characterize all true biography, life-writing may be accomplished in a rich variety of dress; it may, too, be as subjective as Jerome Cardan's "The Book of My Own Life"¹⁹ * or as purely objective as Froude's "Caesar."⁸³ But we have a right to assume that whenever the intent is faithfully to depict a life, with personality and temperament as outstanding characteristics of the picture, we have biography, and only biography, if the work is done with a reasonable regard to the requirements of the ethics and the art governing this department of literary expression. The failure of biographers to get the fundamental notion of distinct problems, methods, and materials accounts,

* In order to obviate the necessity of using repeatedly the full titles of the various biographical works referred to in the text, the briefer and more commonly used titles are employed for the most part, with a number attached for reference to the exact title listed in the "One Hundred Representative Biographical Works," to be found in the Appendix.

in a large measure, for the ever-growing list of biographies that are not only commonplace but bad, from the standpoint of real *life-writing*.

A perplexing feature of the anomalous situation of biography among literary forms is that, while would-be biographers are as multitudinous as short-story writers, scarcely any of them have made an effort to give the public much aid in appreciating their art, such as is not only common enough but taken for granted in the case of the short-story and most other literary forms. The interested reader of biography has a right, not only to a complete presentation of the character and achievements of the subject of a biography, but also should have available a scholarly statement of the principles of biography, with such a consideration of definition, classification, and scope of materials, the historical development of the various forms in which it appears, and the generally accepted ethical standards, as is regarded as essential in all other departments of literature.

But this would involve a frank espousal of the claims of biography to distinct aims, exclusive material, independent problems and meth-

ods, and other departmental features. This is indeed what eventually the consideration of biography must come to. The idea of separate treatment for biographical literature, however, strikes across old departmental boundaries and threatens, apparently, to disturb certain established classifications; hence, the advocates of a change have hitherto been rather weak-voiced and little has been accomplished. The rut-travelers of literature, though they may feel that the disposal of biography under the head of history, even when labeled "personal," or its fanciful distribution among the better recognized branches of pure literature, is insufficient and unsatisfactory, stagger at the difficulties of getting any sort of consistent philosophy of the subject. Walking in the trodden paths, however devious the way, is easier than breaking a new trail. But, indeed, the values of biographical studies are becoming too well recognized to permit of their present indeterminate position among letters to continue much longer. That headway is being made, however, even in overcoming certain prejudices against the innovation, is evidenced in the splendid work of Dr.

Ambrose White Vernon, who founded our first academic department of biography in Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota, and has now been called to organize a similar department at Dartmouth. Dr. Richard Cabot, likewise, is doing a splendid piece of work on biography at Harvard. Wittenberg has a chair of biography; and several other universities have at least gone so far as to introduce courses in the subject.

While biographical readings of all kinds have had hitherto only an incidental use in our colleges and universities, it has been long recognized both within and without academic circles that it is in these transcripts of life that we find not only the incentive to a correct approach to the great works of literature, as well as the triumphs of history, art, and science, but the only dependable cue to their full understanding. In point of fact, only in so far as we can know an art product from the creative point of view can we have any real basis for the belief that we have a wholly intelligent appreciation of its motive and spirit, or think that we can correctly estimate its importance. To neglect, therefore, to make use of the biographical element in the

interpretation of a masterpiece of art is to lay a foundation for that obliqueness of opinion which constitutes the chief curse of modern critical methods. To realize Burns, Carlyle assures us, we must know his relationship to the society about him and the relationship of that society to the poet. This is essentially the cue to a safe estimate of any man or his work.

The tremendous interest of the better class of readers should be capitalized, not by producing the sensational stories of every freakish character that appears in the news of two successive days, but rather by the formulation of definite standards by which all life-writing, in whatever form it may appear, may be properly gaged as to permanent values. Only by some such deliberate effort can biography be put on a plane of legitimate production and higher enjoyment. With all the present enthusiasm for biographical readings, this department of literature will secure the permanency it deserves among the great arts only by conforming to those principles that have established in human regard all other great forms of expression of the human spirit. However roseate the outlook

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is at present, suffice it to say that much depends, in the way of accomplishment of the most modest ideals, upon how persistently literary complacency is allowed to block the way.

THE AGE-OLD INTEREST IN CHARACTER
AND ACHIEVEMENT



A LITERARY PARTY AT SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS'S
After the painting by James Doyle

I: THE AGE-OLD INTEREST IN CHARACTER AND ACHIEVEMENT

§ I

THE BIOGRAPHICAL "IDEA" PRIOR TO AUGUSTINE'S ADVENTURE IN LETTERS

HERO-WORSHIP has found its frank Carlyles in every age; it is in reality the heroic in history, as the Sage of Chelsea maintained, that accounts for its ever-enduring hold upon us. But this rightful worship of the great, though it is so intimately bound up with our interest in achievement, has, however, its basis in the character of the admired individual. Hence, the great historic figures who have impressed their generation and are capable still of gripping our minds were men and women not merely of outstanding accomplishment but of especially imposing personalities. The religions of the world are everlasting testimony to the probable truth of this statement. It is the individuality and temperament—distinguishing characteristics

—of a Prometheus, a Mahomet, a Cellini, or a Pasteur, far more than their accomplishments, that makes them eternal guests of our minds.

Biography, which has all that is implied in personality as its essential and distinctive province, represents that aspect of hero-worship which aims to perpetuate the best in life and living. This purpose may, indeed, be considerably obscured in many individual biographies, but it is, nevertheless, the reason for the existence of biography as a form of expression. The age, the race, nationality, humanity, and life—all have their parts to play; but between these and achievement is the individual himself, who modifies within himself all these influences into a distinct personality. All accomplishment, such as, for example, a book, as far as it is in any way a contribution, is fundamentally the outcome of this personality.

The desire to perpetuate that which claims interest and attention is co-existent with the human race. It manifests itself even in the earliest records of all peoples; and perhaps before racial consciousness took the form of memorials to achievement and character in legends and in-

scriptions, some effort was made to keep in memory, by some sort of concrete expression, ideals of leadership. At any rate, in the myths of every race we have the deeds, traits, and aspirations of men preserved and glorified.

In the essentially human characteristics attributed, for instance, to Prometheus, the alleged creator of man himself, we find exemplified the biographical attitude of early peoples. This champion of man's rights—even in defiance to the divine, if necessary—indeed appears in one guise or another in the early records of many of the more intellectually advanced peoples and is representative of the biographical elements of mythology. Based, perhaps, upon a few actual facts, human traits tended to become idealized or to be looked upon with suspicion; and, in time, character and achievement became a glorified tradition. But in these legends human attributes worthy of preservation are always more or less evident. The ample literature that has gathered about the actions and traits of Prometheus, for example, would have an acknowledged historical basis rather than the legendary shading if the inspirer of the stories had

lived in a more recent period. The myth was, in reality, a method of preserving biographical data before the days of written records. Tracing the "Promethean spark," as it flashes forth from age to age in the works of an Æschylus, a Bacon, a Milton, a Goethe, a Byron, or a Shelley, constitutes not only a magnificent tribute to the traits of the individual that shape the affairs of the world, but evidences the continuous appeal of strong character values. The story of Prometheus, however, is but a type of the biographical treasures which the ancient myths hold; many of the more important ones parallel in interest the Promethean story. We are justified, at any rate, in reading into these "cunningly devised fables" a reflection of the attributes of their creators, such as to give a fairly accurate view of the lives of the people to whom these idealizations meant so much.

While mythology, as a whole, bears eloquent testimony to man's desire to interpret the riddles of life, it is in the writings chiefly of the ancient Hebrews that the mysteries find their earliest consistent explanation. The world in which they found themselves was at least less

of a mystery to the adherents of Jehovah than it was to the worshipers of Jove. Life and its duties were simplified for the ancient Israelites by more definite prescription than was the case with most of their contemporaries. In the lives of the Patriarchs, therefore, we expect specific details to replace the shadowy hints of the inspirer of the Prometheus story.

While in the myths, it is true, biography is not present in a very conscious form, there is sufficient emphasis on the individual character and achievements of persons of the Old Testament to justify much more than the assignment of the mere biographical impulse to many of these stories. Many of them, like the Egyptian "Book of the Dead," are richer in suggestion than they are in reality; but in such records as the touching tale of friendship found in the book of Ruth, we find a deliberate life-story, with the character and personality of the central figure so strongly emphasized as to become the dominant interest. The minutiae of a modern biography are here, such as attentions shown to a shy stranger girl at the harvest feast, and how she pockets the scraps at the feast to take

home to her mother-in-law. "This story," declares Moulton, "has done more to enable us to live over again in remote Hebrew antiquity than all the heroic achievements of Joshua and Judges put together." And in that *souvenir de famille*, the apocryphal book of Tobit, we have a very genuine memoir. Though it is a picture of loving family life, it has a very commonplace conjugal quarrel, with consequences both grave and gay. Indeed, the ancient Israelites seemed to realize full well the value of the human touch that has given to biography its greatest source of power.

Though these peoples had little thought that they were writing biographies instead of histories, as was the case for some centuries to come, yet biography becomes, in fact, a fairly well defined literary form among the Greeks and Romans. Even in the fourth century before the Christian era we find Xenophon making an effective and highly creditable defense of his master, Socrates, in a book of "recollections" of the great philosopher. "The Memorabilia,"⁴⁶ a tribute to the memory of the distinguished teacher, is preserved after more than two thou-

sand years, no less as a memorial to Xenophon's famous intellectual guide than as a testimonial to its author's acute biographic sense. This product of "the Attic Muse," indeed, possesses some of the characteristics of the best type of objective life-writing. A clear sense, moreover, of many of the requirements of pure biography is shown in "The Lives of the Sophists" and the "Apollonius of Tyana," by Philostratus, and "The Life of Plato," by Olympiodorus of Alexandria. The conception of biography, even of the ancient type, was not as full and rich as it was soon destined to become, but the Greeks were contributors in this field, as they were in most other departments of expression.

One of the most highly prized remains of classical literature, indeed, is biography *par excellence*; the revelation of character through a series of concrete incidents and pictures would be a credit to the most modern of life-writers. The "Lives"¹ of Plutarch is a work of such superb qualities, in fact, that we are still content to emulate it rather than to try to improve upon it. "The Parallel Lives" (Bioi Paralleloi), as they are more exactly termed, were narrated

in a series of "Books," each containing the account of one Greek and one Roman, followed by a comparison of their more striking characteristics. There have been, unfortunately, some losses of certain portions of these biographies and some omissions in the original plan, due apparently to unfinished work on the part of the author. What we have, however, is enough to reflect glory on this type of writing for all time to come. Owing to their learning and many delightful literary qualities, as well as a fine philosophy of life and lives, they are considered a necessary part of the reading program of any one interested in the best in literature.

The character of Plutarch's contribution to biography is set forth in an admirable preface to Clough's edition of what is commonly called Dryden's translation:

Plutarch is a moralist [he tells us] rather than a historian. His interest is rather less for politics and the changes of empires, and much more for personal character and individual actions and motives to action—duly performed and rewarded; arrogance chastised; hasty anger corrected; humanity, fair dealing,

and generosity triumphing in the visible, or relying on the invisible, world. His mind in his biographic memoirs is continually running on the Aristotelian Ethics and the high Platonic theories, which formed the religion of the educated population of his time.*

Plutarch's biographies were written, it is commonly conjectured, during the reign of Trajan. The author was a native of Chæronea in the Greek province of Bœotia. His stay in Italy, which appears to have been rather prolonged, was in behalf of the public business of his fellow-countrymen. His life probably covers the period from A. D. 45-120, the best and happiest age of the empire. It was the period in which Epictetus was teaching the high moral principles that so effectually molded the life of Marcus Aurelius.

This Marcus Aurelius, whom De Quincey calls a Christian by anticipation, has left a unique record of himself in his "Meditations,"⁹⁸ a contribution of significance to biographical literature. The ancient biographer had, apparently,

* "Plutarch's Lives," translated by John Dryden and others; revised and edited by Arthur Hugh Clough. 4 vols., 12mo. London: Stewart & Long. 1880-82.

never thought of presenting his own character and personality; his bent was toward the objective; even Plutarch, with all his capacity for philosophizing, kept his characters mainly in action. In the "thoughts" of Marcus Aurelius, however, the stoic emperor leaves a biographic form that stands out as self-biography, a sort of intellectual and moral "confession" more widely known in such works as Pascal's "Pensées" and Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation of Christ."

The standard of the Roman biographer, nevertheless, continued to be, with but few exceptions, simply a *curriculum vitæ*, well illustrated in Curtius's "Life of Alexander the Great." This type of biography involves merely a straightforward narration of events, a presentation of the facts of a life from which character is to be inferred—a method, indeed, which lends itself better to a life of action such as that of Alexander than it would to a thinker and dreamer like Amiel. In modern times, Froude has given us an example of this kind of biography in his admirable "Sketch of Julius Cæsar,"⁸³ which adheres pretty closely to the ex-

ample of Curtius; but the English biographer paints a larger background and of course succeeds in giving a much better portrait than the Roman chronicler; indeed, Froude, no doubt, shows the full possibilities of this method of life-writing. The *curriculum vitæ*, or event story, relates itself more closely to the view of biography as history and is rapidly being replaced in popular esteem by *interpretative biography*.

That the ancient biographers were capable, however, of producing life-stories of the highest excellence is evidenced in Tacitus's biography of his father-in-law, "The Life and Character of Agricola."² In this work Tacitus not only very properly memorializes his love for Agricola, but, in doing so, produces a biography of such exceptional worth that it is commonly found even in very small collections representing the best "lives" in the world's literature. The dwelling upon the character of Agricola as an important biographical element places Tacitus in the company of those who have had the present-day notion of what distinguishes real biography from amplified chronology. The

work of Tacitus is valued as a masterly biography, *because it gives an adequate portrayal of the life and character of its subject*, one of the most illustrious of Romans. "In all literature," says Charles Kendall Adams, "there is no grander monument to the memory of an able commander, a just administrator, and a good man." *

The closest approximation we have in classical literature to the function of "professional biographer" is presented in the work of Cornelius Nepos, whose life covered the eventful periods of the end of the republic and the early part of the reign of Augustus. He appears to have been on terms of friendship with the most eminent men who adorned the capital of the world at that time. In his writings he devoted himself almost exclusively to history and biography, but always seemed to be fully aware of the difference in the requirements of the two modes of expression. Though he is regarded chiefly as a biographer, and was so looked upon by his contemporaries, his greatest glory is perhaps as an

* "Manual of Historical Literature," by C. K. Adams. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1888.

inspiration to Plutarch in his great undertaking. He is certainly not to be credited with the authorship of "Illustrious Men" (*De Viribus Illustribus*), though his name has been associated with this work, but not without protest, since the third century. This work was probably written by Aurelius Victor as late as the fourth century and has since been confused with the "*Vitæ Imperatorum*" (*Lives of the Commanders*) or other works which Nepos did write.

The outstanding achievement of Nepos is his "Life of Pomponius Atticus." The material was drawn from an intimate personal acquaintance with Atticus; and the writer was himself an eyewitness of all that he relates. He excels in the important biographic art of knowing what is characteristic and in painting with a few vivid touches.

The collection of brief biographies known to have been written by Nepos, Plutarch's "Lives," and the "Illustrious Men" furnish a type that has retained a large place in popular biographical reading. The opportunity for grouping and comparison, particularly since the impressive example of Plutarch, has always proved an al-

luring bait to the biographer; hence, collections of lives, such as those of the saints, the painters, and the poets, wherein a common interest in life is the nucleus around which the material is gathered, have from time to time appeared, with something of Nepos's intent of exercising a moral influence upon contemporary life. Among the more notable instances in which the earlier models have had their effect, those that have retained a more or less general interest are Jerome's "Lives of the Fathers," Vasari's "Lives of the Painters," Fuller's "Worthies of England," Johnson's "Lives of the Poets,"³ and Sainte-Beuve's "Portraits of the Eighteenth Century." * ⁸⁰ The possibility of presenting these stories from so many different angles and such widely varying points of emphasis not only appeals to the biographer, but also to the reader with a theory of the group. These sketches also fill the need of those readers who want the story of great men and women of common purposes and achievements in brief compass, and satisfy the vanity of special groups

* The reference here is of course to the English translation made from the works of Sainte-Beuve.

who wish to know something of the leaders in their field, but who do not feel that they have the leisure for more extended reading of longer individual biographies.

These brief biographies, however, in the hands of a master may have the characteristics of the best in the biographical field. Even among the ancients we have much that would do credit to Dr. Johnson or Sainte-Beuve. Suetonius's "Lives of the Cæsars," for instance, presents the stories of the Cæsars in such an unreserved way as to suggest some malice on the part of the biographer; but this notion probably arises from the fact that he confines himself to the personal history of those of whom he writes. He shows himself, however, an admirable portrayer of character, manners, and customs. Whatever questions of ethics may be raised, we have undoubtedly in his story of the first twelve Cæsars not only a work extremely valuable in subject-matter, but one that has frequently been pronounced as carefully composed, with an extensive use of authorities and a striving after objectivity. These biographies are, moreover, as near the modern anecdotal type as

the ancients deigned to approach. Much the same ground is covered by De Quincey in his "Lives of the Cæsars," but with more emphasis on recondite matters connected with the stories of their subjects. As has been the case with Napoleon, and now is the lot of Washington and Lincoln, the Cæsars have furnished a fascinating field for interpretative biography.

But the most illustrious of the name, C. Julius Cæsar, while he has been a favorite theme for every department of expression from even the days of his contemporaries, is the only one who has made any considerable contribution toward self-appraisal. As a sort of apology for an undertaking that had had no official authorization, Julius Cæsar thought it expedient to give a detailed account of his Gallic campaigns to the Roman senate each year at the close of his military activities. Though intended as an official report of military campaigns, this work, which has come to be known as Cæsar's "Commentaries,"⁶¹ is of especial interest to the biographer as either the direct or remote inspiration, and in some instances as the guide, of some of

the great diary- and memoir-writing of subsequent centuries. The central figure of the "Commentaries," handled in genuine Byronic fashion, is the author himself; from this fact the story has far more than a mere historic interest. It is indeed the story of a very important period in the life of the world's greatest man of action. The impression we get from it is substantiated alike by the historian Mommsen and Cæsar's best biographer, James Anthony Froude, to the effect that Cæsar was doubtless the greatest man that history presents for our examination. Opinion has shifted from age to age as to many aspects of Cæsar's character and achievements; today, we are inclined to agree with Froude in the belief that Cæsar thoroughly understood the needs of the Roman State of his times, and would have saved his country from all its threatened dangers but for his untimely death. But whatever may be the merits of the contentions as to the comparative greatness of the man or the nature of his ambitions, his "De Bello Gallico" is of indisputable value in itself as a unique contribution to literature and as the beginning of a memoir form that

has furnished the world with some of its richest literary treasures.

It was through Cæsar's great contemporary, Cicero, that the art of letter-writing gained literary significance, and the biographical writings of the Romans was given a larger human interest value through self-revelation. Covering the period from the year 68 B.C. to the year 43 of the same era, the 846 letters of the great Roman orator which have come down to us present a complete revelation of the man—a complete key, indeed, to the character of the distinguished philosopher and literary celebrity. Cicero's letters, even in ancient times, were very popular; but they appear not to have been known except through quotations during the Middle Ages; our manuscripts, in fact, were first discovered by Petrarch in the fourteenth century. There were apparently many more of Cicero's letters in circulation among the generation or two immediately following him than we now possess; but the collection we have is sufficiently complete to give us a fair view of the author and to furnish the materials for an independent estimate of his character.

The judgment of Cicero, both as a man and as a writer, has undergone extremes of view, particularly since modern times. For him Mommsen has nothing but contempt; Froude, however, is more temperate in his condemnation. With magnificent talents, high aspirations, and a very genuine desire to do the right, Cicero united an infirmity of will, a passion, a cunning, a vanity, and a conspicuous absence of manliness and truth, difficult indeed to reconcile. Such is the substance of Froude's opinion, presented in what is perhaps the best picture of Cicero ever drawn. Froude's estimate, however, indicates no qualities that may not be inferred from Cicero's letters. These "Epistles," indeed, rival in their frank, free outpouring of his most intimate thoughts and emotions the truest confessional literature of the days of Rousseau. They show no evidence of being intended for public perusal, but for the most part bear the impression of immediateness.

In rather striking contrast to these are the "Epistolae" of the younger Pliny. Beautiful and scholarly though they undoubtedly are, Pliny's "letters" lose much of their interest and

attractiveness in being so manifestly intended for the public eye. While they are clearly not a product of the moment, they give a good picture of the period and present the well-meaning and tender-hearted scholar about as well as most autobiographies picture their subjects.

While Pliny was yet a child, some biographic studies were written that were destined to influence the human mind far more effectually than all the philosophies presented to even this eager Roman lover of learning. At least three of the Gospels were probably written from 60-70 A.D. From perhaps a much larger number of these memoirs current at least among a limited group during the first century, we have remaining to us, however, only four accounts of the earthly life of Christ. The literary history of these has many interesting aspects; and their "Eternal Truth" is paradoxically subject to widely different interpretations. But, fundamentally, the intent of the writers of the Gospels was *biographic*, with all that the word implies; and a large part of the civilized world has since acclaimed their purpose as an inspiration. St. Luke even takes occasion to preface his

Gospel with the statement that his work is that of an annalist, interested in giving an exact biographic narrative. The purpose of the other evangelists was no less than that of setting forth, from one angle or another, the character and personality of their Subject. So obviously biographic are these stories, whatever thesis each may support, that Moulton advocates, in his "Modern Reader's Bible," the use of "Acts and Sayings of Jesus" as a common subtitle to the Gospels, with the suggestion that they are essentially the authoritative biographic facts and declarations of their Subject.

The Epistles, as a whole, are not unlike much that has been presented in this special field of biography up to modern times, so far as their general character and form are concerned; and even when fitted into their proper places in "The Acts of the Apostles" constitute only the indirect autobiography of personal philosophy.

The New Testament has, however, been the inspiration of much of medieval biography. In consequence of the principles enunciated in these writings and the emphasis placed upon the individual as the real unit of society, we have

seen the dominance of the State replaced by the reign of the individual, and the objective as a center of interest give place to the subjective. Biography, as a result, has become a story telling itself as well as a life-narrative being told.

Coleridge has remarked that the most effective way of gaining the chief objects of history would be to present history in the form of biography, chronologically arranged. It is indeed essentially the history of the early church that Jerome, the great Christian scholar, presents in his "Lives of the Fathers." Until as late as the seventeenth century, in fact, it was usual to treat the lives of distinguished men from a historical or a philosophical point of view. To the historian a man was the embodiment of a principle: however admirably fitted into the scheme of the literary historian, for instance, Dante may be as the exponent of medievalism, Milton of puritanism, or Dryden of classicism, there is, thanks to the growth of the biographical idea, a refreshing tendency today to regard a man as an individual first, an exponent afterward. Though Nepos, Plutarch, and Suetonius may have succeeded in their purpose of writing biographies

with a view to illustrating Roman history and thereby popularizing it, and though no small portion of collective biography, even to our own day, has been produced with other than biographical ends in view, yet we hold dearer the stories of the lives of Goldsmith, Lamb, and the Brontës, for example, because their stories have no other purpose than that of setting forth great personalities. However, the Christian church has succeeded admirably in preserving and presenting its best traditions in accordance with Coleridge's notion of effective history: through the lives of the apostles, martyrs, saints, fathers, and other eminent groups of teachers, it has told its story more appealingly than through its most brilliant generalizations. Not all these group biographies are above question either in point of method or material; but they have preserved, with the ever-recurring note of humanity, a story of the individual working out an ideal of supreme value to mankind.

To Eusebius, bishop of Cæsarea, commonly called the father of church history, who lived about 260-340 of our era, is given the credit

of having written the first collection of saints' lives; but, unfortunately, the work has not come down to us. At any rate, "hagiography," the writing of the lives of saints, has had a long and full history, dating from the early centuries of the Christian era. Hagiologic criticism, dealing with the compilation of the lives of the saints, however, is a science of much later development; its founder, indeed, was the Flemish Jesuit, Heribert Rosweyde, who published his famous masterpiece, "*Vitæ Patrium*," as late as 1615. But the most notable collection of saints' lives belongs to modern times, having been published by the Bollandists, a branch of the Jesuit order, named from John of Bolland, who appears to have lived about 1596-1665. This collection is called the "*Acta Sanctorum*," the first volume of which appeared in 1643 at Antwerp, and the sixty-sixth volume in 1902.

A saint, according to the accepted interpretation of the Roman, Greek, and Anglican churches, is "one who has exercised the three theologic virtues of faith, hope, and charity, and the cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, and fortitude, in a heroic degree, and has persevered

in this exercise until death.' Despite this rather rigid test, in the "Acta Sanctorum" alone over 20,000 names of saints appear. That hagiography is a subdivision of biography of no little importance and of continuous appeal is apparent, moreover, from the possibility of such works as Alban-Butler's "Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs, and Other Saints," comprising twelve volumes, and Baring-Gould's "Lives of the Saints," which extends to seventeen volumes.

§ 2

THE ERA OF SECRET HISTORIES OF SELF-OBSERVERS
AUTOBIOGRAPHY could develop only with the growth of a sense of individuality. Individualism eventually found, of course, a more or less vivid reflection in pretty much all forms of art, but it is especially significant to note, as a result of the changed attitude toward life and living produced by Christianity, the almost immediate turning from the objective to the subjective in the literature of biography. The first effect of the new philosophy among the biographically inclined was to do for one's self what had

hitherto been the ideal in the treatment of the lives of others, to produce a wholly trustworthy revelation. As the most notable example the very genuine "Confessions"³⁷ of Augustine might be cited. Though this momentous work has been claimed chiefly by the historian of religion, its influence upon the development of biographical literature has been profound enough to justify its appropriation as the first great production of *conscious autobiography*.

This most eminent of the church fathers gave his celebrated "Confessions" to the world in A.D. 397; with this date real autobiography, as a recognized form of life-writing, has its beginning. Prior to this time, it is true, we have the remarkable collection of letters of Cicero, and some hint at self-biography from Pliny and a few others, and such sporadic examples of self-revelation as that found in the "Meditations"⁹⁸ of Marcus Aurelius. But these hardly measure up to the sort of deliberate detailing of the inner life needed to inspire a Rousseau. St. Augustine's contribution to autobiography was, as one might expect, primarily a religious confession; but it was his life and character that he

lay bare; and as a sincere revelation of what constituted the very essence of that life it was as effective as autobiography usually becomes. Like all genuine products of the inner life, the impression it made was deeply felt, not only upon the churchman but upon the seeker after the true note in literature as well. Its influence, indeed, may be recognized, either directly or indirectly, on all subsequent confessions of any great consequence, whether so named or not. In fact, most of our present-day autobiographic forms, however much modified from the original confessional ideal, bear a relation to this great prototype of "The Confession." The pedigree of the biographer of the confessional type must inevitably go back to Augustine.

Following the impressive example of Augustine, biographers appear to have been drawn more and more to the possibilities of the subjective treatment of the life-story. The pre-Christian writers felt a certain disdain for self-revelations, but did not hesitate to give at times much that was by no means public property in the account of another's life: Suetonius was doubtless much freer with the facts of the lives

of the Cæsars than he would have been willing to be with the details of his own life. Nevertheless, throughout medieval as well as in early modern biography the inner life of the individual, particularly as reflected in self-revelations, is the dominant interest. While pure confessional literature does not reach its flowering stage until Rousseau's day, self-biography of something less than the out-and-out confession rapidly usurped the place formerly given almost exclusively to strictly objective life-writing. Even in the fifth century Paulinus and St. Patrick show by a subjective treatment vivid consciousness of their individual responsibility to the society about them, and, Cellini-like, felt it an obligation to set down the record of their lives "with their own hands." Character and achievement, as represented in the story of autobiography, is, indeed, of scarcely less interest and value to the psychologist than to the *littérateur*.

While the great literary innovation of St. Augustine profoundly affected all self-biography, yet his imitators in true confession seemed slow to make themselves known. In

Italy, however, after a thousand years, we find Dante narrating in detail his great idealized love-story in "The New Life"³⁸ (*La Vita Nuova*), in which he relates the history of his love for Beatrice. This is continued afterward in his "Convito," with much additional information relating to his own life. As works that stand out in the world's literature, we have, about two centuries later, Benvenuto Cellini, in his widely popular "Memoirs,"⁴⁸ and Jerome Cardan, a fellow-countryman and contemporary, in "The Book of My Own Life,"¹⁹ carrying on the tradition and extending the confessional idea in preparation for the pre-eminent specimen of Rousseau. Though deliberately prepared for the eyes of the public, Cellini's story was circulated only in manuscript until 1730, almost two hundred years after the author's death. In the stories of Cardan and Cellini we have much of the artistry that has produced such a wide vogue for this type of reading; but, after all, they are perhaps but typical of the host of diarists, journalists, and memoir-writers who, later, made eighteenth-century literature brilliant in biographical contributions.

Rousseau's "Confessions"⁴⁰ met fully its author's expectations, in astounding the literary world of his day with an unexampled baring of the actions of his checkered career and the character behind it. Benvenuto Cellini had perhaps been no less sincere before Rousseau conceived his plan of moral shock, but the Italian artist had at least a more praiseworthy intent, that of reflecting glory on the name which he bore. With a dare to any man to follow his example and declare, "I was better than that man," Rousseau opens his "Confessions" with the boastful statement:

I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself.*

Rousseau, indeed, nowhere spares himself, but his vaulting ambition perhaps overleaps itself, for in his eagerness to tell us the facts he fails to leave the clear-cut impression that the less

* "The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau," edited by Hedouin. London.

pretentious Cellini makes. But, notwithstanding his belief that no other man would wish to imitate his example, there have been many since his day who have declared their intention to tell the naked truth, despite the consequences. The literary confession has always proved too good a means of securing the impression of merciless truth to be overlooked, an appeal that results consistently in a wide and interested group of readers.

Those whose ambition it was to follow in Rousseau's steps appear, however, to have had less of the "integrity of nature" than that which characterized the French classic. Confessional ideals with Goethe, for example, appear to lose much of their original force, notwithstanding the fact that he seemed to be able to express his personality in most of his other writings. The "Dichtung und Wahrheit,"⁵² intended to be a confession after the Rousseau type, but resulting in more or less idealized memoirs of the preparatory period of his life, leaves the impression that he was more interested in his undertaking as a literary excursion than in revealing the man. The English echoes, as confes-

sions, likewise promise more than is fulfilled. Coleridge's "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit" recalls much of the great archetype, Augustine; it is manifestly sincere, but as merely an intellectual inquiry constitutes a very limited autobiography. So, too, with the nearest thing to a book which De Quincey gave to the world, "The Confessions of an English Opium Eater": its qualities as literature outweigh its characteristics as an utterly truthful confession. The charm and high seriousness associated with such names as those of Goethe, Coleridge, and De Quincey are calculated to influence our judgment into accepting as adequate that which merely purports to be such; we cannot help feeling, however, that, in comparison with "Les Confessions" of Rousseau, as biographies they suit better the notion of an idealized memoir than that of a pure confession.

Autobiography of the confessional type developed gradually, in a sort of reaction, into a number of forms of less soul-searching revelations. With something less than the complete frankness of Cellini and Cardan, diaries, journals, records, recollections, reminiscences, and

otherwise-titled memoirs gave with steadily accumulating vigor the subtle flattery of imitation to the great autobiographers. Such self-records, which may be given the general title of Lavater's "Journal," "The Secret History of a Self-Observer," have maintained a large place in modern biography-reading. The classic examples of Evelyn and Pepys, in which social and political observations loom large, have, however, been overshadowed in the popular mind by such methods of treatment as appear in the "Diary"⁷⁰ of Fanny Burney and the "Journal"⁶⁹ of Eugénie de Guérin, or perhaps Marie Bashkirtsev's "Journal of a Young Artist" and the more subdued "Journal"⁶⁷ of Audubon, in which matters of a livelier, more personal nature are given the right of way.

The development of the *subjective memoir* is, in fact, a comparatively modern aspect of biography-writing. Objective forms of the general type of memoirs are, however, found even in the literature of the ancients; Justin Martyr, indeed, gives, in his apologetic writings, the striking term of "Memoirs of the Lord" to the Gospels. The term is loosely applied to many

biographical forms occurring prior to the modern period to which more specific biographic titles would be appropriate. The close of the eighteenth century, at any rate, found the autobiographical memoir, under its variant titles, in full blast, particularly in Italy, Germany, France, and England. The nineteenth century kept pace with the growth of this as with most of the other forms of biography, and to no small degree through this form created among us a popular interest in general biography second only to that of fiction.

The French have for upward of two centuries regarded the *mémoire* as their special literary province; they have, most assuredly, an uneclipsed record for many brilliant productions of this kind. The most important group is that centering around Napoleon and his wars. While many of these "things worth remembering" are, as is the case to a greater or less extent in all countries in which the form has had any considerable vogue, partly or wholly concerned with political interests, yet some of them are of a strictly personal nature and of large literary interest. Of the pre-Revolution memoir, that

of Saint-Simon is perhaps the most generally known, while of the Revolution period the "Memoirs"⁵¹ of Madame Roland are representative, at least among foreign readers.

If, as is frequently asserted, the reading of the great autobiographies would prove to be an excellent introduction to the history of the modern world, how truly would this statement apply to the period of Napoleon Bonaparte! An intelligent opinion and a very accurate picture, indeed, of the life of eighteenth-century France may, I believe, be gotten from the reading of merely the "Mémoires" of Jean Bailly, Madame Roland, Rochambeau, Madame de Staël, Madame de Rémusat, and Philippe d'Orléans, to select only a few of the fifty or more notable productions of this kind given to the public during this period. "The Memoirs" of the Countess de Boigne, which cover the period from 1781 to 1819, for illustration, contain recollections of Marie Antoinette and the French court before the Revolution, of the life of the *émigrés* and the Napoleonic *régime*. She describes Napoleon's return from Elba, the Hundred Days

and the Second Restoration. Her intimate portraits of such people as the Duke of Wellington, the Prince Regent, the Princess Charlotte, Pozzo di Borgo, the Emperor Alexander, and Madame de Krudener, and, finally, her description of English society, make a fascinating picture of the time.

In the first half of the nineteenth century autobiographies and subjective memoirs, dealing with events or explaining political line-ups during the Napoleonic era, continued to be written and published in large numbers. In the latter half of the century, however, the *literary memoir*, a much more personal form of self-biography, with more of self-revelation and less attention to outward events, began to replace the earlier type. In France the literary memoir is admirably represented by Eugénie de Guérin; and for purely literary values, eclipsing even the eighteenth-century glory in memoir-writing, might very appropriately be added the names of Paul Béranger, de Musset, Lamartine, George Sand, Dumas, de Goncourt, and Renan. This list of names marks the heyday of the literary memoir and sheds an ever-

lasting glory on the biographical literature of France.

So far as English biographical history is concerned, the "boom" in memoirs was apparently started by Charles Greville. Unlike the general law of supply and demand, in the reading of books the demand is created by the supply. Though from the days of Froissart through the periods of Pepys, Evelyn, and Defoe, the English Maecenas held in high regard his limited memoir heritage, yet this sort of reading had never gripped the public until the journalist of the reign of King George IV and King William IV made it possible for the world to gloat over his clever character portrayals. With the *dura lex sed lex* attitude of the author of "The Mirrors of Washington," never hesitating to speak ill of persons in high places, he showed all the qualities calculated to insure popularity. While Greville's attention, like that of Evelyn, was devoted chiefly to the historical and political happenings of his day, the appeal of his work was sufficiently general to re-create the fashion of keeping and eventually publishing various types of diaries and journals.

Simple autobiography, as represented in such a life-story as that of Edward Gibbon, seems to have found a congenial atmosphere in English-speaking countries; fewer English autobiographies appear, at any rate, to deal with other problems than that of presenting the life and work of the subject. Notwithstanding such notable forerunners as Cardan's "The Book of My Own Life,"¹⁹ dating from the sixteenth century, and Richter's "Truth from My Own Life"²³ and Andersen's "The Story of My Life,"²⁵ pure autobiography comes into its own in the England and America of the nineteenth century. A respectable list of self-biographies concerned only with the presentation of the personality and achievements of the subject might be gathered from several countries, covering a period of several centuries; but it is rather in English-speaking nations of the last century and a half that such biography achieves anything like a popular mode of expression as life-writing. Gibbon's American contemporary, Benjamin Franklin, produced a model of this kind in his "Autobiography,"²¹ the first authoritative edition of which appeared as late as 1868.

The best of English authorship in this line is represented in the autobiographies of John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer. Hugh Miller's "My Schools and My Schoolmasters,"²⁷ in which the author uses an oft-recurring motive for his autobiography, the story of his education, though for half a century a deservedly popular work, suffers by comparison with the masterly production, "The Education of Henry Adams,"³⁰ an autobiography which embodies many of the best traditions of the past and the improved technique of the twentieth century.

§ 3

LIFE-WRITING AS A DELIBERATE PROFESSIONAL UNDERTAKING

OBJECTIVE biography-writing, as a literary exercise or as an obligation of the living to the dead, has been practised in one form or another from the earliest periods of which we have any literary records. As a deliberate professional undertaking, however, it was not until Izaak Walton's day that life-writing can be said to take its beginning. It was, in fact, with the pub-

lication of the separate biographies that constitute his "Lives" that this type of writing became finally a recognized aspect of literature. Walton's "Lives" appeared at intervals from 1640 to 1678; meanwhile Fuller was busy with his "Worthies of England," and John Aubrey was getting ready to publish his "Minutes of Lives." English biography may indeed claim a less conspicuous beginning as early as the reign of Henry VIII, when Roper published his "Life of Thomas More" and Cavendish wrote his "Memoirs of Wolsey"; but the professional biographer had not yet come into existence. Not until Walton's time was biography regarded as anything more than a whimsical effort at history-writing; from the middle of the seventeenth century, however, the professional biographer has pressed his claims with increasing emphasis upon the attention of the public.

Pure biography had, as yet, been mainly of the straightforward narrative type of life-writing; only the ancient biographical works had become the common property of all nations; even Cellini's "Memoirs" ⁴⁸ were hardly known outside of Italy. But with the publication of

Johnson's "Lives of the Poets,"³ 1779-1781, even simple biography made a notable extension of its legitimate boundaries: with the famous "Lives of the Poets" what has come to be known as *critical biography* had its recognized beginning. A considerable part of most subsequent biography of the objective type is concerned with criticism, as an element of appreciation of character and achievement and as a means of estimating rank and value. How important the critical aspect of biography has become is evidenced in the innumerable "studies" by the essayists of the last century, relating to the life and work of people in every walk of life. The critical work, indeed, of men like Macaulay, Stephen, Lowell, Stevenson, Bagehot, and Dowden, as merely representative of a very long possible list of eminent writers who have shown an interest in this phase of biography, would constitute a veritable library of biographical criticism. But such criticism, though even in disconnected "studies" essentially biography, has become an accepted feature of pretty much all life-writing.

The high-water mark of biographical litera-

ture was, by common consent, reached in Boswell's "Life of Johnson" ⁴; all that biography-writing has had to boast of as a task to tax the best minds can be found in the epoch-making work of this otherwise apparently mediocre Scotch biographer. The praises of Boswell's "Johnson" have been sung, since its first appearance, by almost every one who has really read it. There are those, as is inevitable, who would have this or that feature of the great work modified; and some find it difficult to believe that the work itself can be so overshadowingly great when the character of the writer left such an unpleasing impression upon most of his contemporaries. Recent close study of Boswell, however, presents a more favorable view of the character of the great biographer than that which has become traditional. At any rate, when the ends of biography are understood and the best means toward the accomplishment of its purposes are better realized, they will be found largely exemplified in this unique production. "The Life of Johnson" is not only in itself an absorbingly interesting story for even the untrained reader, but the life and character are

presented with a richness and completeness that will satisfy the most skilled biographical critic. The subject, the biographer, and the biographer's method—all deserve the closest scrutiny by those who would form definite conceptions of standards for life-writing.

Among the excellences of Boswell's method of handling his biographical material was the use he made of illuminating correspondence. While he was not the originator of this device of making use of letters of a familiar kind for purposes of illustration, the distinction belonging rather to a contemporary biographer, Mason, who introduced the clever stroke in his "Life and Letters of Gray," published in 1774, yet Boswell showed its possibilities for purposes of biography-writing. The use of letters at once became so popular that the association of "Life and Letters" was soon looked upon as an established method of accomplishing the ends of biography. Such titles, therefore, as Trevelyan's "Life and Letters of Macaulay,"¹⁶ Stanley's "Life and Correspondence of Charles Kingsley," and Froude's "Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle" have become matters of

course, though their history dates back not much more than a hundred and fifty years. The significance of the letter as biographical material has been emphasized in Cross's remarkable achievement in presenting the life of George Eliot in the compilation which he entitled "George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals."²⁸ The author makes George Eliot her own interpreter.

Letters are, of course, among the literary treasures of every age; but it is rather with collections that the biographer is concerned when he wishes to form an opinion of the character and personality of the writer. Collections, however, with the few notable exceptions such as the "Letters of Abelard and Heloise," written in the Latin of the twelfth century, and two or three classical writers, are almost unheard of until we reach the modern period of literature. Modern letter-writing, at least so far as biographical values are concerned, may be said to have begun with the date of the "Paston Letters."³¹ Covering practically the whole fifteenth century, these letters constitute the remarkable correspondence of the Paston family, of the

county of Norfolk, England. They are a veritable mine of historic and literary treasure. From the next century, too, English correspondence of tremendous volume and value survives.

As remarkable as are the early epistolary remains, from whatever standpoint they may be examined, for most of us the representatives of this phase of self-biography, as such, are likely to continue to be the moderns, with Madame de Sévigné and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu as individual favorites. Brilliant as are such collections as "The Etchingam Letters," "The Letters of Junius,"³⁴ and "The Letters of Chesterfield to His Son,"³⁵ from many angles, yet the average reader will find more keen delight in the rich personal flavor and the fine literary qualities of the letters left us by Cowper, Madame D'Arblay, Lamb, Byron, Shelley, Macaulay, Dickens, and Kingsley. The more imposing collections, moreover, are sometimes too obviously intended for publication to have the highest value as biography. While, however, even a sentence from a letter may have biographical significance, it is rather from what we may call the more complete letter-writer, one

whose life-story is fairly well told in his letters, that we are sure to have the character rather than a mood presented. Hence, the value of the collection as autobiography.

Rare judgment and effect were likewise shown by Boswell in the way he makes use of conversation and anecdotage as biographic material. Boswell and Johnson lived in the days of the coffee-house, when conversation was still regarded as an art well worth the effort to cultivate. Though Goldsmith, Garrick, Reynolds, Sheridan, Burke, and others hardly less distinguished in their respective fields, were members of the clubs which Johnson frequented, yet among this illustrious group conversational ability enabled the Doctor to become the central figure. Boswell was at the master's feet; the admiring disciple, pondering and planning his great work, was content merely to listen and take notes, for he saw in this daily conversation the material he would shortly need for his undertaking in character-sketching.

From this period, too, as far as English literary history is concerned, dates that interest in "table talk," which has become in itself a type

of life-writing. Opinions, conversational *bons mots*, attitudes of all possible kinds and shades, and general intellectual characteristics constitute a rich source of material for the study of personality and temperament. Selden, it is true, had given some indication before Johnson's time of the interest and value of this sort of record of his intellectual history; but it is rather in the generation of the Old Dictator of English Letters and the one immediately following that talk was elevated to the plane of an art. Who would not, for instance, be willing to play the Boswell to such a group as Coleridge, Haydon, Hazlitt, and Hunt as they gathered just for the joy of talk as a fine art?

Though Suetonius, unlike his predecessors in biography, did not feel it necessary to eschew personal anecdotes, but, on the contrary, used them extensively as a means of illustrating and popularizing his sketches, yet the anecdote as a means of presenting traits appears to have been of a very slow growth. With the development of the notion of biography as considerably more than the chronicling of events, the use of anecdotes, along with conversation and letters, has

become in modern biography a well established point of method. Indeed, since Hester Lynch Piozzi's "Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D.,"⁹⁹ there have been published many separate volumes of anecdotes, such, for example, as that of Miss Hawkins, over which De Quincey had such a genuine spree of fun-making in his review of the volume entitled "Anecdotage." But the anecdote at times claims a much larger place than that of a mere adjunct to biography; the life of Shelley, for instance, is presented by Richard Henry Stoddard as an "Anecdote Biography of Percy B. Shelley." As a means of picturing the essential personality of a subject the anecdotal method is in keeping with modern ideals of biography-writing; and when used with judgment adds a desirable flavor to what otherwise might prove a rather tasteless dish.

The principal interest of many other aspects of the world's literature is essentially biographical. We are not accustomed to thinking of them as life-writing, but realize, upon a little reflection, that personality and accomplishment con-

stitute their substance. Such is the literature of travel.

Even a small corner of the world was a large place in the days of Mandeville; so, when men had the rare opportunity of seeing other parts of it beyond the narrow confines of their immediate neighborhood, they felt it incumbent upon them to leave a record of their experiences for the benefit of the stay-at-homes. But those who remained behind and whose tastes led them to this sort of reading have never lacked for a view of the world as seen through others' eyes. From the Munchausen-like yarns mingled with the facts told in "The Voyages and Travels of Sir John Mandeville"⁸⁷ and the experiences narrated in "The Travels of Marco Polo,"⁸⁶ a book which Mr. H. G. Wells selects as one of the ten most important books of the world on account of its influence upon exploration and the extension of geographical knowledge, books of travel have provided a continuous feast of novelties. They were like stories from other worlds in the fourteenth century of Mandeville, when a knowledge of places and peoples was confined

to a very limited area. The real period of exploration, however, came after the discovery of the New World, when men's imaginations were fired by the reports brought back from remote corners of the earth of strange peoples and lands of undreamed-of wealth and beauty. While travel has never since ceased to be an obsession in the minds of the daring, it was not until four centuries after Mandeville and Polo that travel literature really came into its own. Coincident with the stories of Cook's "Voyages"⁸⁸ and Mungo Park's "Travels,"⁹⁰ interest in such records reached the high point which it retains with us. There was consequently an eager public awaiting the marvels of Du Chaillu, Livingstone, and Stanley, as there is with us a ready response to the reports of the Beebe expedition or an effort to reach the interior of Africa by airplane.

Indeed, the less thrilling "pictures from abroad" have never ceased to win and hold our attention, though mere geographical distance has become well nigh annihilated. Few of us now read de Tocqueville's account of America, but it delighted the French people for a long time;

but most of us know Irving's sketch of the England of his day, for the "Sketch Book" is his most generally read work. The Italy that Montaigne and Madame de Staël saw continues to interest us, even by the side of the Italy painted in other colors more recently by Mrs. Jameson and Warner. The *Wanderjahr* of Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister" is, in general estimation, his most interesting period; while Heine's "Harzreise"⁹¹ is little less popular than his lyrics. And even for the Johnson enthusiast, who alone would be inclined to read it, the good Doctor's "Tour of the Hebrides" makes him less a lexicographer and more a citizen of the world. Whether they are the mere letters of travel of an earlier day or the voluminous literature of travel of our own time, we can see in such records a type of autobiography that reveals much of character in the impressions that experiences make upon the writers.

The periodicals of England and Scotland, in the early part of the nineteenth century, were under very able editorship. The influence of these journals was consequently very marked upon the literature of the period. As primarily

literary publications it was their custom to note at length anything so significant in that day as the publication of a new volume. A new work of any literary merit served quite frequently, however, as a mere excuse for a rather lengthy essay in criticism. Moreover, much of the best work of the period, both critical and creative, first appeared in these journals. De Quincey, for example, became the victim of such continuous demands on the part of the publishers of these reviews that his entire literary leisure, which in his case happened to be the greater part of his time, was as a result devoted to contributions to the journals of his day. The story of Carlyle's literary career is, likewise, very largely a record of relations with the publishers of the magazines of the period.

In 1825, Macaulay, a young man then not yet out of college, wrote a review of a recently published manuscript of Milton's which happened to be discovered by some one rummaging through old state papers. The form of this review, as well as the spirit and content, introduced some new notions in critical literature, particularly in its relation to the life of the subject.

This effort of the young Macaulay bore the ambitious title of "An Essay on the Life and Writings of John Milton."⁷² Though actually the historical essay had been introduced over a hundred years before by Defoe in his "Review," nominally "The Review of the Affairs of France," issued from 1704 to 1713, to Macaulay is given the credit of introducing the modification which we are now accustomed to term "the biographical essay." This type of biography-writing became immediately popular; and Macaulay's reputation was at once made. Shortly afterward, Carlyle, realizing its possibilities for just the purpose he had in mind, used the form for his "Essay on Burns."⁷³ Others quickly followed the examples of Macaulay and Carlyle; and for a century we have had a constant stream of such brief biographies, retaining their original freshness and effectiveness; the last half of the century of its introduction, in fact, saw most of the prose writers making extensive use of the easy freedom of the "biographical essay" as especially adapted to the demands of modern readers.

It was but a short step from the critical essay

in biography to the literary portraits. Events and estimates were felt to be inadequate: the man either did not seem to be closely enough connected with the outer events of his life or the events themselves in so brief a treatment left no clear or complete conception of the man. In England, shortly after the newness of the simple biographical essay had worn off, wherein some special viewpoint of the author was likely to be stressed, picturing the character and personality of people of importance soon became as popular a form as its immediate predecessor in biography. Such portraits retained a large place in the biographical methods of the rest of the century. Walter Savage Landor, in his "Imaginary Conversations," ⁷⁸ and Thackeray, in "The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century," ⁷⁹ had prepared the English public for Sainte-Beuve's eminently successful pictures of his rather commonplace subjects in his famous "Portraits." Pater, Stevenson, and Froude added further glory to literary portraiture, putting it on a plane of the best in the prose literature of the period. In "Margaret Ogilvy," ⁸⁵ a presentation of his old mother, Barrie produces

in this line a delightful piece of literary craftsmanship after the manner of the panel-effect of the painter in colors.

The so-called school of new biography is the logical outgrowth of literary portraiture. Even the most tradition-bound biographer perhaps aimed at something like a portrait of his subject; yet his method, particularly his notion of the sacredness of chronology, not infrequently precluded the possibility of a picture. Since, however, the conception of a biography as a truthful presentation of the essential character and personality of the subject has become dominant, we feel that interpretation is the first duty of the biographer and that his reconstruction must secure the impression of a life as it was, not as it might have been. Thus, Strachey's "Queen Victoria" is gratifying to the admirers of this great sovereign, because those who knew her feel that the biographer has given a just interpretation of her life. Any correct interpretation implies, of course, that the life is portrayed against the special background that most truthfully brings out the real character of the subject.

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Though, perhaps, he does not regard himself as a biographer in the strictest sense of that term as it is understood even today, yet the very essence of his work makes the achievements of Gamaliel Bradford identical with the best objectives of the most successful biographers of all times. Picturing the souls of men in utter truthfulness is the highest aim of the writer of the literary portrait and is the acknowledged objective of the exponent of "the new biography." Mr. Bradford, to my mind, is not only a biographer, but welds into actual accomplishment the best conceptions of the literary portrait and the highest attainments of the biography of the twentieth century. What he is pleased to call "psychography," or the natural history of minds, lays the emphasis on what a man was rather than what he did, on the essential character of the individual instead of on the mere incidents of his life. Even above Strachey he is the exponent of all that is new in "the new biography."

Biography is commonly regarded by those with the historical obsession as "history in the singular." That the meaning of history itself,

on the contrary, is found in the lives of individuals finds support, it appears, in the completeness and effectiveness with which a period of large historic interest is reconstructed about the life of an individual. Even for historic purposes alone the meaning of a period was presented by more or less direct biographical material gathered about the life of an individual; hence, we have innumerable historical studies, such as "The Days of Cicero," "The Era of Napoleon," "The Age of Milton," and "The Reign of Victoria." But, more recently, fiction has appropriated the great human-interest values of biography, and stories possessing all the charm of fiction, but the essential elements of historic truth, have usurped the place of the older historical romance. The biographical idea in "Hugh Wynne," giving, as it does, photographic studies of Washington, and in "The Crisis," where the many-sided nature of Lincoln is revealed, is, for many readers at least, an added attraction to a good story. But it is perhaps in such stories as the "Ariel" of Maurois and the "Glorious Apollo" of the fertile-minded "E. Barrington," presenting definite studies as they

do of Shelley and Byron respectively, that we get a definite notion of biographical fiction as distinguished from what has long been called "historical fiction." The "Glorious Apollo," for instance, is much more directly concerned with the presentation of the character of the great English poet than it is with a picture of the period in which the events of his life took place, though the incidents enumerated are cast against a clear-cut background. It is not as important, therefore, though the purpose may be primarily fictional, that the facts selected be as true to history as that they be consistent with a sound interpretation of the central figure's individuality and personality.

Since the advent of the biographical essay, the longer biographies have been paralleled in popular interest by a number of forms of briefer sketches. Biographical notices, personals, brief characterizations, caricatures, lampoons, libels, and even obituaries, appear on every hand as a striking testimony to the lively interest in anything of a biographical nature. The biographical dictionary, making no pretense to give other than the outstanding biographical facts of an au-

thoritative nature, is indeed regarded as an indispensable feature of any well-equipped library. "The National Dictionary of Biography," edited by the eminent professional biographer, Leslie Stephen, is the standard of such works among English-speaking peoples, particularly for British biography within this compass. The Germans and the French have likewise done satisfactory work along this line; and America has just recently projected plans for the perfection of such a dictionary, to be comparable in every way with that of the British. Filling such biographical needs represents at least a natural adjustment of biography-writing to the demands of busy though non-literary readers and the praiseworthy general desire to have some information as to the lives of men and women who have stood out from among their fellows. But, as biographical forms, they are only the merest suggestions toward real biography.

A great share of the world's most cherished literature shows the undying interest in character and achievement manifested in varied ways in every age and nation since the beginning of

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history. Its development has been steadily emphasized from age to age from the outer to the inner, from the acts and achievements to the character and personality of the subject—from what man has done to what man is, from mere history to biography. The forms and methods of presenting the story of *a life* have changed as other aspects of literary records have evolved from simpler to more complex states; but the great aim, notwithstanding frequently shifting viewpoints, has been essentially the same throughout the centuries: to present the subject of biographical treatment as a *revived personality*. However wide of the mark many biographies may actually be, with few exceptions the intent has doubtless been to memorialize the best that has been known as to the springs of human conduct and accomplishment—to explain why the man has stood out from the crowd and to gratify the world's deep desire to honor its heroes.

A READING LIST

As extensive reading as possible is, of course, urgently recommended; but such readings

THE LITERATURE OF PERSONALITY

should be made in biographies that contain the best ideals of the art in its various stages of development. And, moreover, as a book should be judged by the standards of the age in which it was produced, it is better to select the works somewhat in the chronological order. The following list is representative of the essential demands of each distinct phase of the art of life-writing:

ANCIENT BIOGRAPHY

- The Memorabilia Xenophon (B.C. 430-357)
- The Commentaries of Cæsar (B.C. 58-52)
- The Lives of Plutarch (46?-120?)
- The Life of Agricola, by Tacitus (97 or 98)
- The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius (120-180)

THE MIDDLE PERIOD

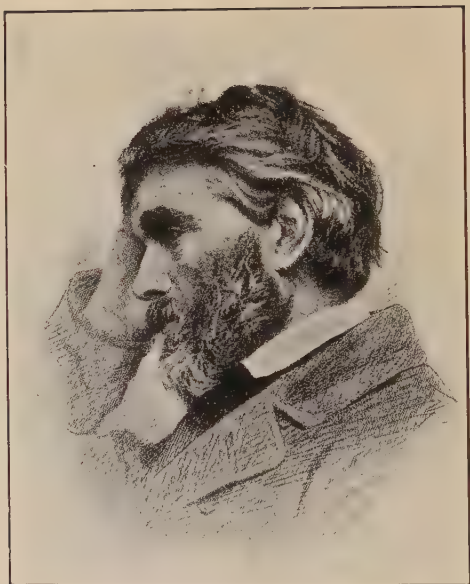
- The Confessions of St. Augustine (354-430)
- The Travels of Marco Polo (1254-1324)
- The Voyages and Travels of Mandeville (1356)
- The Paston Letters (1422-1509)
- The Memoirs of Cellini (1500-1571)
- The Book of My Own Life, by Cardan (1501-76)

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MODERN BIOGRAPHY

- The Letters of Madame de Sévigné (1626-1696)
The Diary of Samuel Pepys (1659-1669)
Memoirs of the Reign of Louis XIV, by the Duc de
Saint-Simon (1675-1755)
The Confessions of Rousseau (1712-1778)
Letters to His Son, by Chesterfield (1774)
The Life of Johnson, by Boswell (1791)
Lives of the Poets, by Johnson (1779-1781)
Gibbon's Memoirs (1737-1794)
Essay on Milton, by Macaulay (1825)
The Prelude, by Wordsworth (1850)
The Greville Memoirs (1857)
Portraits of the Eighteenth Century, by Sainte-Beuve
(1857-1862)
Froude's Sketch of Cæsar (1879)
Apologia pro Vita Sua, by Cardinal Newman (1801-
1890)
Margaret Ogilvy, by J. M. Barrie (1896)

THE MARKS AND INDICATIONS OF THE
SOULS OF MEN



THOMAS CARLYLE
The Sage of Chelsea

II: THE MARKS AND INDICATIONS OF THE SOULS OF MEN

§ I

THE BIOGRAPHER AS A SPECIALIST IN PERSONALITY

IN the opening paragraph of his "Life of Alexander" Plutarch takes occasion to state the principles upon which he based the selection of material for such lives as those of Alexander and Cæsar:

It must be borne in mind [he tells his readers] that my design is not to write histories, but lives. And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever. Therefore as portrait-painters are more exact in the lines and features of the face, in which the character is seen, than in the other parts of the body, so I must be allowed to give my more particular attention to

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the marks and indications of the souls of men, and while I endeavor by these to portray their lives, may be free to leave more weighty matters and great battles to be treated of by others.*

It is not a difficult thing to find writers of biography who have failed to apply the excellent principles laid down by Plutarch; yet, the aim of the great Roman biographer was pre-eminently sound and has been recognized by his successors in the art, at least, as the theoretical point of emphasis. To make a practical application of paying more particular attention to "the marks and indications of the souls of men" is a much more difficult thing than to present the events of an individual's career. But the external facts of a life, however abundant they may be or however adroitly they may be dealt with, do not constitute any more of a biography than the annual newspaper summary of the year's events represents a history of the preceding twelve months. Facts are as essential to biography as they are to history, but in

* "Plutarch's Lives of Illustrious Men," translated by John Dryden and others.

neither case do they constitute in themselves much more than source material; chronology is the same in relation to biography as it is to history. Genuine biography aims at something behind the facts; its prime function is to re-create a life, to vivify a personality. And while we need a much finer regard for facts than Plutarch himself evinced, we require no finer objective for life-writing than he has established.

The informational type of biography, even when the intrinsic interest of the events is exceptional, is no longer regarded as adequate as a life-writing enterprise; the rewriting of biographies has become, in the past few years, an increasingly popular literary exercise, chiefly because of the need for an interpretation too frequently lacking in the earlier life-stories. To the ancient biographer, what one did was sufficient indication of what one was; but even among them we hear Plutarch's voice raised in protest against such a narrow conception of his art. Events of large significance filled the great Julius Cæsar's life; and since his own day efforts have been made to tell its story.

Of these we might select three that show typical biographical methods. Suetonius told the story with an emphasis on events, but did not wholly disdain descriptive lingerings and anecdotes; his method showed at least an advance toward the ideal of Plutarch. Froude's "Sketch,"⁸³ while built upon the principle of a studied presentation of the facts of Cæsar's life, is thrown against a background sufficient to distinguish it from the simpler ancient type; otherwise, Suetonius himself might have written it. But even the best of modern scholarship, so easily summoned by Froude, suffers by comparison with such a method of treatment as that given by De Quincey in his "Essay on Julius Cæsar." Froude painted a portrait, it is true, but it was a portrait solely of a man of action, of "more weighty matters and great battles"; De Quincey's bare outline, however, is a definite interpretation. Treating a common subject, he shows himself less concerned with mere chronology, and, making large use of anecdotage, exerts himself in the painting of a picture such as he believed the man's contem-

poraries saw. Laying aside the relative values of these presentations of Cæsar, so far as adequate biographies are concerned, the essential difference is here between the handbook type of biography and the photographic product of modern times.

True biography has come to have but one standard of measurement: an adequate presentation of cause and effect, a stressing of the "why" rather than the "what." Involved in this in such a way that the blending results in a clear-cut unit must be the elements that we commonly call "individuality," "temperament," and "personality." However carefully made the sequence of events, research and scholarship alone are not enough to show us a living human being. Deeds spring from character; ideals, thoughts, aspirations, all are but the expression of the spiritual. Hence it is that the eternal, inevitable character of the subject must be perfectly pictured in a genuine biography. It is not enough to have certain reactions to life, but rather the fully pictured nature from which such reactions spring. It is in this respect that

Plutarch makes his greatest contribution to biography-writing: he reached the important point of defining the individual exactly.

I must protest against that sort of biography which bases its claim to completeness on the amount of material available. Such, it is scarcely necessary to point out, does not perforce imply a satisfactory life-story. It is obviously the way in which the material is handled that counts in properly individualizing the subject. Failure to discriminate between that which has life-writing value and that which has not even the remotest relation to the character of the subject is an all-too-common fault of much of our current biographical output.

Biography as an art goes deep into the springs of human character. To most normal minds the story of real human beings is of far greater interest than the play of imagination centering around fictitious characters; the child's oft-repeated query, "Is it true?" represents an attitude that is likewise common with the adult. The best and most definite inspirations often come, too, from the stories of other lives, those victories and defeats of real people whose ex-

periences can be translated into their own actual daily living. Plutarch, it will be recalled, wrote his "Lives" ¹ for Roman youth, in the belief that the illustrious examples which he held up to them would be the best possible source of inspiration for the continuance of the traditions that were held dear in his day. Many successes in life give testimony, indeed, to the statement that biography, more than any other form of literature, has been known to inspire a youth with faith in himself and to give him a determination to make the most of his life. But no one believes that a mere recital of events could accomplish such results; the trick is turned, by solving the fundamental problem of all life-writing, in vitalizing and humanizing what would otherwise likely turn out to be but padded chronology.

Yet the feeling is well-nigh universal that there is no philosophy of undressing in public. Certainly, underlying a consistent philosophy of presenting a life is the conception of biography as something far more than the mere *story of a life*, in which facts are orderly arrayed for their own chronological sake; it harks back

rather to the etymological meaning of the term "biography" as *life-writing*, in which character and personality constitute the essential features. When such a notion of biography is actually attained and becomes a working definition, instead of a mere intellectual acceptance, among others than the biography specialists, there will at least be a recognized province for the biographer. Whenever the intent is to picture a life, or even an aspect of it, with personality and temperament as outstanding characteristics in methods and objectives, we are dealing with biography. As such, it properly includes letters, confessions, memoirs, and diaries of all kinds, biographical essays, literary portraits, and certain forms of poetry, as well as the strictest forms of pure biography and autobiography; for all these forms of expression are but the various modes of presenting in part or in whole some life or other, whose essential self is thought worthy of perpetuation.

That the aim to depict character and personality is the determining factor would be readily granted by the more successful biographers, whatever the angle may be from which the task

set himself by the biographer has been approached. Southey writes simply "The Life of Nelson"⁵; Lewes tells "The Story of Goethe's Life"¹⁵; Boyesen makes a combination study of Goethe and Schiller as "A Critical Study," while Walt Whitman's life is made simply "A Study"; but all alike are fundamentally what Thackeray entitles his biographical studies, "Character Sketches." Masson may term one of his studies simply "Chatterton: a Biography"¹³; Charles Kingsley's story may be told in "The Letters and Memoirs of Charles Kingsley"; Cross may let George Eliot tell her own story in "The Life in the Letters of George Eliot"²⁸; or Carlyle may try to set the world aright toward his hero in "The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell"⁹ or present some of his other favorites in history more openly as "Heroes"⁷⁴; but, again, to Emerson they are "Representative Men."⁷⁵ Approaching the undertaking in different ways and emphasizing different aspects of their lives, these eminently sincere biographers nevertheless show a like desire to get at the mainsprings of the lives under consideration and evidence as a principal

concern that their interests lie in the realm of character.

No reader of biography need be told that innumerable examples of this department of literature furnish unbounded delight and inspiration simply as human documents. We may be told of some great achievement of a distinguished man, or we may see and admire a fine specimen of art; but neither the achievement nor the art can ever mean as much to us as either might mean when once we have entered into such personal relationship with the author as is possible through a good biography of him. Let him but be admitted to our circle of friends, or even of acquaintances, and his accomplishments will ever have a different relation to our lives. While, moreover, the possibility of an extensive circle of intimate friends is limited for most people when such intimacy is dependent upon personal contact, yet through biography we may learn to know and to sympathize with the world's great characters more fully than was the privilege of most of their closest companions. The world of Samuel Johnson, that

moral world of the individual, is doubtless much better known to us through Boswell than it was known to most of Johnson's contemporaries. For all biographers this possibility of recreating the moral world of the subject carries with it the suggestion that the *sine qua non* of life-writing must ever be the usual and commonplace newspaper standard of what is "fit to print": that which has human-interest value.

The inevitable admiration of figures that loom large in the story of the development of nations accounts for a great share of biographical literature. But the desire to exalt rare characters is fundamentally an admiration of strong personalities. This, however, would explain the appearance of only objective biography; but since the beginning of the Christian era, through the political, religious, and social emphasis of the individual in history, there came gradually into being a literature of self-study which has found its expression in autobiographical forms. The result has been that the modern world at least has virtually accepted the dictum of Cel-

lini, presented in the opening paragraph of his "Memoirs"⁴⁸:

All men [he assures us], whatever be their condition, who have done anything of merit, or which verily has a semblance of merit, if so be they are men of truth and good repute, should write the tale of their life with their own hand.*

Whatever our view of Cellini's "good repute" may be, it appears that most of the autobiographers have believed that their "semblance of merit" was safer in their own hands than if left to a perhaps capricious interpretation by others. But an additional thought, and a very significant one, in those with a turn for self-analysis is that the subjects themselves are best acquainted with the character and motives behind their actions and purposes, and that their stories would consequently have a much more authoritative tone when told from the viewpoint of the one experiencing the events and conditions, rather than to have it presented from an observer's position, always possible, as it is,

* "Memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini, a Florentine Artist, Written by Himself," translated by Anne Macdonell, New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1903.

of imperfect understanding. Hence, the frequent decisions, even in the case of lives primarily of action, to write the story "with their own hand."

To "write the tale of their life with their own hand" must be regarded as preëminently fitting in the case of those lives of a highly spiritualized nature, such as an Amiel or a Eugénie de Guérin, as well as in those stories that manifestly require the subject's own statement, as, for instance, Heine's "Die Harzreise."⁹¹ Of course, the real underlying reason for many autobiographies is, no doubt, to be found in the common desire to have *the truth as the subject himself sees it* presented for the examination of those who may be properly interested; but in this undertaking the essential condition of genuine biography, a revelation of the personality of the subject, may not be at all adequately met. When, however, one has deliberately presented his own story, he can have little fault to find with the critics who misunderstand him; he has assumed full responsibility for the result from the standpoint of ethics and art.

Now it is much easier to give concrete examples of the beautiful in art and life than it is to define satisfactorily what the terms "beautiful" and "artistic" in themselves imply. Carlyle's range of emotional effect was extremely limited when compared with that of Burns, but to single out the exact emotions which each was capable of arousing, much less to explain the cause and nature of those emotions, is quite a different thing from experiencing in a general way their effects. So, too, is it with "personality." Neither Benvenuto Cellini nor Rousseau was very admirable as a moral type, but we feel more or less drawn to both because we recognize in them, despite certain low moral standards, outstanding personalities. We may think of the attributes of personality, such as character and will, or we may regard the attributes as collectively making up the character and nature of the individual and term this personality; but our sense of its concrete expression in a Benjamin Franklin or a Charlotte Brontë is something far more than is possible of simple definition. "I am warned by the ill example of many philosophers," says Emerson, "not to

attempt any definition of beauty." This warning, I believe, might serve as well in the matter of defining personality.

The most striking characteristic of personality is that it is unique and, as such, different; Charles Lamb holds us not only by what he did but by what he was, because in his life there was a uniqueness that distinguished him from other men. This difference in the man, his attitude toward life, the special turn his hopes, fears, and aspirations took, served to individualize him and set him apart; thus, by comparison and contrast, there is a response within us to what the scientist terms "a new set of properties"; and this we call personality. Whatever distinguishes a man—such as his mode of thinking or acting, his habits and manners, and, indeed, even his language and tastes—contributes to the sum total of his personality. It is what he really is rather than what he affects to be—not mannerisms, eccentricities, oddities, peculiarities, and the like, in themselves—that constitutes the man's personality. As much a part of him as his real life-flow, it courses on, intertwined with what at times we call temperament, and becomes

an expression of his character. Scott and Byron, in life and work, present a striking contrast in most of the respects that constitute their essential selves; Lockhart and Moore have found the traits that are most personal and characteristic in each, and in setting forth these have individualized their subjects in such a way that to *realize* them is an easy task for us.

A dozen or more years ago Sidney Lee set forth as one of his fundamental principles of biography that it is the duty of the biographer to transmit personality.* This exclusive aim recognized not only a special province but a particular type of writer whose privilege it is to work in it. It has been the custom, it is true, to call one who writes the story of a life a *biographer*, but not in the distinctive sense in which we speak of a dramatist or an essayist. We think of Boswell as Johnson's biographer; of Rousseau as the author of some extremely candid confessions; and of Southey as the author of a "Life of Nelson,"⁵ but regard these works as simply among the products of these authors.

* "Principles of Biography," by Sidney Lee. Cambridge University Press. 1911.

It was, however, not a mere fancy that induced Leslie Stephen to entitle some of his work as "Studies of a Biographer." That, indeed, was exactly what he was, for his interests were mainly biographical, whatever the form in which he cast his thoughts. If we should take into consideration the character of the great bulk of the work of some of the eminent men of letters who have devoted their energies, not to the production of a single work of transcendent merit, but rather to the supplying of varied biographical studies, constituting—as was the case, for instance, with Carlyle, De Quincey, and Kingsley—a large share of their literary labors, it is not difficult to see this distinctive appellation of "biographer" as particularly fitting. We must, indeed, recognize the classification of "professional biographer" for an author like Forster, not only on account of the merit and the extent of the biographical works which he produced, but more particularly because he chose biography as a medium of expression, just as he might have chosen history or the essay.

The dignity of the art may well be learned

from Johnson's "Lives of the Poets." ³ Not only as the subject of the greatest of our English biographies but as a biographer himself, Dr. Samuel Johnson is clearly one of the sanest whose interests touched this field. By both example and precept his contributions to biography-writing have been of tremendous value and effect. His "Life of Savage," for instance, leaves little to be desired in a presentation of a life-story of such limited scope. There is doubtless little of merit in either the life or the art of Savage, but his skilful biographer caught and preserved that modicum of worth to be found in every human being, however worthless he may appear to the eyes of the world, and gave it a fair and sympathetic presentation; and the fine sense of proportion evidenced in dealing with every biographical problem the subject's life offered sets the brief story on a plane with such masterpieces as Carlyle's "Sterling." Some of the outstanding successes since Dr. Johnson's day are indebted to the sort of inspiration which he was capable of furnishing: ideals of good judgment, fairness, and sincerity. There is little doubt that

Boswell's masterpiece is indebted as much to the influence of its subject's mind upon that of his biographer as it was to the kind of "life material" which he furnished.

The biographer, then, is a specialist in personality; his particular duty is to know what individualizes his subject, to vivify this material, and to re-create the life exactly as it was lived. While differences of interpretation will always arise, as they did about the motives and acts of the man while living, a life-writing undertaking must leave a clear conception of the essential being of the subject; a definite personality must stand out; or else, the best that can be done is to stretch the term and call the work "biographical." But *personality* must loom large as a center of interest and attention in the mind of one who essays to write a life-story.

§ 2

SOME NEGLECTED ASPECTS OF BIOGRAPHICAL TECHNIQUE

To see biography as a type of expression largely independent of history and more nearly iden-

tifiable with what we vaguely call pure literature, or at least representing a definite aspect of literature, is a fundamental problem for the literary critic who wishes to know the meaning of *life-writing*. Absence of clear standards and safeguards for the protection of both subjects and the reading public has stood in the way of a general recognition of biography as a distinct art. But evidence is accumulating that biographers are trying to find and make known appreciable criteria for both the composition and the appraisal of life-writing. The chief difficulties arise from a confusion of the problems, methods, and materials of a biographical project with those of other departments of expression. The technical demands of history, fiction, or drama are much better understood by the reading public than those of most life-writing forms; yet the essential elements of a good biography would appear to be more easily grasped even by the untrained reader, in that every bond is established by virtue of the common requirements of life itself. But biography has been dismissed with a definition, and that fundamentally wrong.

That biography has distinct problems, methods, and materials, and that no other department of expression completely overlaps it in aim, stands in need of some emphasis. The historian's assumption of biography as a part of his own field, a sort of hang-over from ancient times, has finally come to be regarded as an unwarrantable extension of his legitimate boundaries; as his claim appears, however, to have been based on his need and constant use of biographical material, his appropriation of it has, until recently, been only mildly protested against. Within the present century, however, there has grown up a rather persistent demand for an independent treatment of biography, with all that the notion includes; Sidney Lee and Waldo H. Dunn, in England; Misch and Glagau, in Germany; and Thayer and Burr, in this country, are, in the nature of their work, virtual exponents of such claims. Indeed, many of the historians have now reached the conclusion that their special field will be made still richer by a more general appreciation of the special province of biography.

Even when the biographer is dealing with

events, the distinctive results he is aiming at, as a biographer, is the perfect presentation of a life, not the picture of an age, a race, or a community; so, while history may be "the essence of innumerable biographies," * it must be insisted upon that biography is a separate unit rather than an aspect of a complex type. Carlyle's efforts to impress this point reappear at frequent intervals throughout his writings; and his work enforces his creed. The effort to distinguish biography as "personal history" is a recognition in itself of a difference in the real nature of biography and the usual forms of history. The dominant personalities of history, it is true, are more frequently the subjects of biographical treatment; but biography is the story of a personality, while history proper is rather the generalization of biography. Emerson's view is clear-cut:

All history becomes subjective [he says]; in other words, there is properly no history, only biography.

* * * Civil and natural history, the history of art

* "History of the French Revolution," by Thomas Carlyle.

and of literature, must be explained from individual history, or must remain words.*

Carlyle's "Essay on Burns"⁷³ is biography, but Green's "History of the English People" is essentially history, notwithstanding the emphasis laid on the personal element in history. But that they both may be classed as literature, along with Shakespeare's "Hamlet," by no means breaks down the distinction between biography and history, any more than the application of the term literature to Shakespeare's and Green's works does away with the distinction between the drama and history. History, at least in the general acceptance of the term, has for its particular province a certain emphasis upon the activities of individuals and groups, while literature is more especially concerned with the spiritual side of the race. Yet the exponent of a historical period or a certain age of literature, such as a Napoleon or a Wordsworth, when regarded purely as an exponent, becomes more or less a symbol and fails to get the attention

* "History" (Essay I), from "The Essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson."

he deserves as an individual. But granting the fact that both history and literature receive their meaning from the lives of individuals, biography must be regarded as much more than so much source-material for these: it has the profound value and the undeniable charm of studies in character and personality, not exactly duplicated in either history or literature simply as such. Moreover, literature admittedly resolves itself into a question of personal values, while history, even in its more social aspects of recent years, becomes in its last analysis a matter of individualism; hence, the precedence is in favor of biography.

Yet, biography, to be wholly effective, must make use of this aspect of history: the biographical picture should be cast against a well-defined background. It is possible to wonder at such a monumental work as that of Masson's "Life and Times of Milton,"¹² but not at all likely that any one, unless he be a special student of Puritan England, should become enthusiastic about it *as a biography*. Still, it is an admirable piece of work, replete with the finest of scholarship. The inevitable feeling it begets, however, is that

the subject is made too small a part of the general picture. We are, nevertheless, justified in asserting that an adequate biography usually implies an appreciation of background almost as detailed as we have actually presented here. While an elaborate structure is not needed in the finished biographical product, still the subject of the life-story must stand out in relation to a background present to the mind of the biographer and implied in the work, if there is to be a well-rounded picture of the subject.

There is as yet no guide in biography-writing that can be regarded as a final statement of method. The principles involved in its technical development, notwithstanding the number and character of recent contributions in this field, are left largely to inference. Yet, it would be difficult to find another form of expression that causes so much discussion as to questions of method. Carlyle, of course, gave some constructive suggestions in his all-too-brief essay entitled "Biography." Preëminently a biographer, whether he was writing a formal life-story, an essay, a history, or just a critique, he could have laid a heavy obligation upon the biographer and

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his critic by more specifically stating his views upon the debatable aspects of life-writing; yet it is obvious from his reviews, as well as from his larger literary undertakings, that he had thought deeply along various lines of the subject; and in his characteristic style of the disconnected philosopher he does go so far as to recognize distinctive purposes and methods. But in his essay on "Jean Paul Friedrich Richter," written from the standpoint of biographical criticism, he presents a rather dyspeptic view of the art:

But if the acted life of a *pius Vates* is so high a matter [he states], the written life, which, if properly written, would be a translation and interpretation thereof, must also have great value. * * * That ideal outline of himself, which a man unconsciously shadows forth in his writings, and which, rightly deciphered, will be truer than any other representation of him, it is the task of the Biographer to fill-up into an actual coherent figure, and bring home to our experience, or at least our clear undoubting admiration, thereby to instruct and edify us in many ways. * * * As matters stand, indeed, there are few Biographies that accomplish anything of this kind: the most are mere Indexes of a Biography, which each reader is to

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write out for himself, as he peruses them; not the living body, but the dry bones of a body, which should have been alive. * * * How shall that unhappy Biographic brotherhood, instead of writing like Index-makers and Government-clerks, suddenly become enkindled with some sparks of intellect, or even of genial fire; and not only collecting dates and facts, but making use of them, look beyond the surface and economical form of a man's life, into its substance and spirit? The truth is, Biographies are in a similar case with Sermons and Songs: they have their scientific rules, their ideal of perfection and of imperfection, as all things have; but hitherto their rules are only, as it were, unseen Laws of Nature, not critical Acts of Parliament, and threaten us with no immediate penalty.*

Over a century ago James F. Stanfield wrote an essay "On the Composition of Biography" (1813) that recognized the need of special thought along these lines. Within our own century Sir Sidney Lee set forth quite briefly some of the more important aspects of the subject in his "Principles of Biography"; and William Roscoe Thayer published a series of three lec-

* "Jean Paul Friedrich Richter," by Thomas Carlyle. The Review of Otto's Biography of Jean Paul.

tures on "The Art of Biography." Just recently Waldo H. Dunn has produced a painstaking study of "English Biography," with a detailed presentation of chronologically arranged biographies and autobiographies. But probably the most notable contribution is the critical and comparative study, "The Autobiography," by Anna Robeson Burr, in which a psychological examination is made of the biographer of the subjective type, especially of Jerome Cardan. A reminder might be made also of Phillips Brooks's essay on "Biography," in his "Essays and Addresses," and Leslie Stephen's discussion of "Autobiography," in "Hours in a Library." A few doctors' theses, especially in Germany, dealing with limited aspects of the subject, and some scattered magazine articles of a laudatory type make up the bulk of the rest of the material available. Gamaliel Bradford's contribution to "The Saturday Review of Literature," entitled "The Art of Biography," is the most significant thing that has recently appeared. But even if a complete list of all material were made, it would appear pitifully small when compared with most other departments, some even of

far less appeal than biography is now making.

While biographers have for the most part shown a stronger inclination to write biographies than to discuss principles, they have too frequently overlooked a determining factor in any adequate portrayal of a life: the character of the biographic remains constitutes a large element of success in life-writing. The nature of the biographic material, far more than its amount, determines the kind of treatment necessary, and is, consequently, much more closely connected with the success or failure of the undertaking than is commonly supposed by any but the experienced biographer. The life of Goldsmith, for instance, has been a favorite theme for the essayist and the biographer. There are not only several satisfactory biographies, but quite a large number of brief sketches of "poor Goldsmith," whom the world, since his day, has delighted to honor. In Irving's introductory paragraphs of his "Life of Goldsmith,"¹¹ the best, perhaps, of the many good accounts of the life of this rare character, we have pointed out the secret both of the subject's continued popularity and the successful treatment of his story:

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There are few writers [Irving says] for whom the reader feels such personal kindness as for Oliver Goldsmith, for few have so eminently possessed the magic gift of identifying themselves with their writings. We read his character in every page, and grow into familiar intimacy with him as we read. The artless benevolence that beams throughout his works; the whimsical, yet amiable views of human life and human nature; the unforced humor, blending so happily with good feeling and good sense, and singularly dashed at times with a pleasing melancholy; even the very nature of his mellow, and flowing, and softly-tinted style, all seem to bespeak his moral as well as his intellectual qualities, and make us love the man at the same time we admire the author. While the productions of writers of loftier pretension and more sounding names are suffered to moulder on our shelves, those of Goldsmith are cherished and laid in our bosoms. We do not quote them with ostentation, but they mingle with our minds, sweeten our tempers, and harmonize our thoughts; they put us in good humor with ourselves and with the world, and in so doing they make us happier and better men.

An acquaintance with the private biography of Goldsmith lets us into the secret of his gifted pages. We there discover them to be little more than transcripts of his own heart and picturings of his fortunes.

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There he shows himself the same kind, artless, good-humored, excursive, sensible, whimsical, intelligent being that he appears in his writings. Scarcely an adventure or character is given in his works that may not be traced in his party-colored story. Many of his most ludicrous scenes and ridiculous incidents have been drawn from his own blunders and mischances, and he seems really to have been buffeted into almost every maxim imparted by him for the instruction of his reader.*

Here is the great human appeal that makes biography-writing a work of love and enthusiasm; the character of the man shines out so distinctly that the really great end of biography is easily the outstanding consideration in the workmanship. An abundance of the right sort of material, after all, makes the writing of a good biography of Goldsmith an easier task than would often be the case with many lives. He may have been fortunate, too, in having men with the true instinct for biography-writing take this sort of interest in him. Forster, Prior, Black, Irving, have all treated their material

* "The Life of Oliver Goldsmith," by Washington Irving.

well, but the real secret lies, as Irving hints, in the nature of the material their subject presents for them.

The appeal of the material offered by the subject's life is again well exemplified by the much-bewritten Mary, Queen of Scots. No insignificant library of biographical sketches, memoirs, letters, partisan debates, and purely historical treatments might be gathered wholly of material in connection with the character and events of her life. And why? Simply because the human interest values are there ever fresh for each succeeding generation, with the kind of character-revealing material and the elements of romance, debatable as much of it is, to arouse the enthusiasm of those who always feel inclined to espouse a cause. No period of British history has perhaps been more elaborately detailed than that of the span of her life. She ascended the throne, it is true, at the time when England was busy making history; but the purely historical circumstances surrounding her life could not account for the popular appeal of her eventful career. It was rather the individual fortunes of this attractive personality and the

sort of material that lends itself to biographical purposes. It is little wonder, therefore, that Mary's beauty and misfortunes, always an appealing combination, have become the inspiration of an extensive biography at intervals of about five years.

Biographers have usually shown a strong tendency to follow traditional methods in the treatment of their material; but when some one has now and then succeeded in breaking away from the conventional form of a period, he has usually been honored by a host of imitations, whether the particular life under consideration was best presented by this kind of handling or not. The truth is that the popularity of a treatment which may have been perfectly suitable in one case has dictated its adoption in another instance entirely unsuited to such a method. While all life-writing, both objective and subjective, is concerned with the same purpose, each type of biography accomplishes this aim by somewhat different methods of approach. The general purpose of all biography is one thing, and the special purpose that gives unity to the life of the subject is quite another; if a biography is

anything more than a series of detached facts, the dominant traits of a life will show character, but must show it in those things that are having the right of way, which is the aim of the life, conscious or unconscious. Then, again, purpose in the use of biographic material may be shown by the special means or method which the biographer uses to depict the life. For instance, the "literary portrait" is concerned with only so much material as will make a true and consistent picture, and has little need of the complete chronological details of the event type of biography. So, in a number of forms of biography the special purpose in mind will determine both the scope and the arrangement of the material.

The scope of the treatment may vary between the limits of a "biographical notice" and such a work as, say, Masson's "Life and Times of Milton," running to several volumes and constituting virtually a history of a period. Even in the fullest account of a life there must be selection in the use of biographic material, and only by keeping in mind a definitely determined scope can there be that wise restriction that will

prevent confusion. The importance of all details is directly proportional to the relation of such details to the main life-current of the subject; but a brief biographical sketch will use one set of facts, while another treatment of the scope of "The English Men of Letters" series will add to these additional sets, whereas such an extended presentation of a life as that of Lockhart's "Life of Scott" will find need of still others. In the exercise of judgment as to what material is needed for the purpose in hand is found the writer with the true biographic sense; hence, an important preliminary to any biographic undertaking is the extent of the proposed treatment.

The arrangement of the material is in the main determined by the particular form in which the biography is to be cast. It may follow the strict chronological sequence of Vallerey-Radot's "Life of Pasteur," which is admirably executed in this way, inasmuch as Pasteur's character and achievements have an exceptionally large time relationship in them; or the order may be that of the free and easy special pleading for some neglected aspect of a life, such as is frequently

found in the biographical essay. The chronological arrangement of biographical material was once regarded as of supreme importance; but that was when biography was regarded as merely the "story" of a life. But since a better understanding of the true function of biography has been arrived at, biographers are much less concerned with the strict time order than they are with the correctness of their interpretation. Mark Twain's statement of how "I hit upon the right way to do an Autobiography," though extreme, meets a response in the exponents of "interpretative biography":

Start [he says] at no particular time of your life: wander at your free will all over your life; talk only about the thing which interests you for the moment; drop it the moment its interest threatens to pale, and turn your talk upon the new and more interesting thing that has intruded itself into your mind meantime.*

While adequately presenting the character of

* "Mark Twain's Autobiography," arranged for publication by Clara Gabrilowitsch. New York: Harper & Brothers.

the subject in unmistakable outlines must needs be the chief objective of biography, this end may be obtained not only by different forms and arrangements of material but by the selection of only such material as may serve the immediate biographic purpose in hand. If the life under consideration possesses the unity which is quite likely to be the case, when thoroughly understood as a whole, the keynote method is capable of success in the hands of a competent biographer. This method is one of the strong features of some of the best painters of literary portraits; it constitutes one of the excellences of Gamaliel Bradford. To Mr. Bradford the recently much analyzed P. T. Barnum was *a showman*, as the latter declares in his "Autobiography," "and all the gilding shall make nothing else of me."

The key to a life, insists Laura Spencer Por-tor, in her "Haunted Lives," lies in the fact that all lives are "haunted" by certain recurrent thoughts, influences, impressions, or realizations, which, if the biographer will but seize and present to his readers, will leave a picture that no number of dates, or even events, can succeed in bringing to our minds. In support of her notion

she calls attention to the beauty and meaning of light in the mind of Dante; and how the mind of his namesake, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, was haunted by the idea of death, as Keats's was by the idea of beauty. Many lives, of course, evidence plainly enough that there is a dominant motive, ambition, or influence that gives it unity and consequent meaning. This notion was common enough with De Quincey, as can be recalled from his treatment of "The Cæsars." This method of presenting lives from the standpoint of what is having the right of way has the merit of giving to biographies more obvious unity than they might otherwise possess. But the extent to which character is capable of crystallizing would obligate the biographer in any sort of method he might choose to see to it that his story possesses as much unity at least as the life itself holds.

There were some points of technique; thoroughly approved by the best modern usage, of which biographers prior to Boswell's day appeared to know very little, or for which they cared nothing. Boswell, for instance, relied largely on conversation to bring out important

characteristics; the value of this art he doubtless learned from his great subject; but he used it to fine effect. Dean Stanley and Mrs. Gaskell achieved splendid results by mosaics of memorials and letters; while Lockhart likewise made extensive use of letters and journals. More recent biographers have imitated freely the devices of the author of "The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold" in admitting both sides to the "correspondence" for purposes of a fuller characterization. To reflect to what extent our judgments of others are based on what they *say* as well as on what they *do* makes us wonder that efforts at picturing character have been based for so long largely on actions alone.

Letters, however, particularly for purposes of pure biography of an objective type, have been greatly misused. This is true not only from an ethical standpoint but from letters used to support biographic facts and conclusions. Too many professional biographers have relied on a conglomeration of long letters of doubtful interest to either the recipients or the public for character background. While letters may be the best evidence obtainable for temperament and indi-

viduality, at times they are of no value even for external facts. Letters, like other forms of autobiographical remains, are pure poses at times and as such have only indirect value as life-writing material. Taken as a whole, letters are usually good autobiography, especially when there are many of them and they cover a large part of the subject's life; but only when they are sincere and more or less unconscious revelations of character are they to any great degree dependable. The use of extracts, moreover, from wholly uninteresting and unimaginative journals and diaries does not represent a much higher conception of biographical values than the indiscriminate employment of correspondence. The result of such material, like the rehashing of political news of even questionable value as current happenings, and the playing up of the trivial affairs of the subject's everyday life, is the obscuring of the individual and relating him to incidents that have little, if any, real biographic importance. Even in the case of many of the standard biographies, the autobiographical remains of the subject have been relied on altogether too much; the ten-

dency to accept the subject's own appraisal, even when other material is available, is from the point of method at least very questionable. I am aware of the common notion that the subject ought to know best about the intimate details of his life; but then we must not forget that the biographer is responsible to his public for an accurate presentation of the character of his subject, not for making available what the subject thought it was.

To the enthusiast for biography it seems strange indeed that such comparatively little effort has been made to formulate more definite standards for his favorite mode of expression; most aspects of the subject furnish, in point of fact, a large array of confused views the clarifying of which is an outstanding literary need. But even if a consistent philosophy of aims and methods should be advanced, the field is by no means exhausted. There are certain biographical desiderata which the biographer, in justice to his own interests, should undertake to supply. We need not only a standardization of methods, in which accepted principles are made more generally known, but there should be put within the

reach of the reader of biography such solutions of those frequently but unnecessarily debated problems as have been accepted as authoritative. Moreover, cultural values and breadth of appeal would justify treating with sufficient completeness such topics as *the biography* of all ages and countries, particularly as reflecting customs, manners, and habits; *the autobiography*, in its sociological, psychological, and historical aspects; *the diarists*, who kept records of their own times, as well as of their private lives; *the memoir writers*, who recorded for historical purposes, with more or less fullness, the public events in which they had a share; *the essayists*, who mingled autobiography with their reflections on special subjects, giving us the biographical essay as a distinctive type; *the letter writers*, who give us such intimate glimpses of famous people, as well as of their own lives; collections of *brief biographies*, illustrating periods of history or the history of special subjects; *travels*, as the most acceptable means of extending our knowledge of geography through books and people, especially of the more inaccessible places; *confessions*, whereby definiteness has

been given to the inner history of many a brilliant period of a nation's development; *biographical poetry*, that is at times the most intimate revelation of the thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of individuals, as well as of nations; and even *the curiosities of biography*, as strange and pleasing as the unusual is in any other field of literature. Of course, in some instances, certain limited treatments have been attempted, but practically nothing has been done from the standpoint of an organized department of biography, to which it would so readily lend itself.

There is, moreover, only a slightly worked field of alluring projects in such phases of problems and principles as *a historical view of all biography*; *satisfactory definition and classification of biographical forms*; *the technique of biography*, as a whole and of particular types; *the biographer*, both as to what he is and what he ought to be; and *the ethics of biography-writing*. The tracing out of the biographic "idea" in all its varied forms, setting forth the different methods of dealing with the materials of biography, and the continuous evoking of new spirit, from its original in the mythologies of early

peoples to its most recent mode of presentation among English-speaking nations, would at least tend to establish and make more generally known that there are such things as biographical standards.

But whatever may be the uncertainty of method, the difficulties of differentiating biography from other forms of expression, or, indeed, the solution of any of the problems of biography-writing, the inescapable standard of judgment of a biography as a work of art must be: *Is this the man as he lived among his fellow-beings?* All questions, both ethical and artistic, must be subordinate to this one, the ideal toward which the biographer must bend his energies. But in effecting this the biographer needs to keep in mind Spinoza's declaration: "Truth cannot be contrary to the real interests of humanity."

A READING LIST

While much more depends upon how critically a biography is read than upon the reading of a large number of such works, for the purpose of examining into the principles of life-

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writing, yet it is advisable to be familiar with at least one good specimen of each type, if the technical aspects of biography in general are to be understood. I have therefore indicated the most obvious classification of each work in the list that follows, though I have listed them in a sort of chronological order, either of their publication or the period embraced in the record.

MEMOIRS—The Memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini
(1500-1571)

LETTERS—Letters from the Right Honorable Mary
Wortley Montagu (1709-1762)

ANECDOTAGE—Anecdotes of the Late Samuel Johnson, LL.D., by Hester Lynch Piozzi (1709-1781)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY—The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

—Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Edward Gibbon (1737-1794)

TRAVEL—The Sentimental Journey, by Laurence Sterne (1768)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY—The Story of My Life, by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875)

MEMOIRS—Poetry and Truth from My Life, by Goethe (1811)

BIOGRAPHY:

TRAVEL—The Sketch Book, by Washington Irving (1819)

CONFESSIONS—Confessions of an English Opium Eater, by Thomas De Quincey (1822)

BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY—Essay on Robert Burns, by Thomas Carlyle (1828)

BIOGRAPHY—The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell, by Thomas Carlyle (1845)

DIARY—The Journal of Eugénie de Guérin (1848)

MEMOIRS—Memoirs of the Life of Charlotte Brontë, by Mrs. E. C. Gaskell (1857)

BIOGRAPHICAL POETRY—Sonnets from the Portuguese, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1850)

BIOGRAPHY—The Life of John Milton, by David Masson (1859-1880)

DIARY—The Journal Intime, by Henri-Frédéric Amiel (1882)

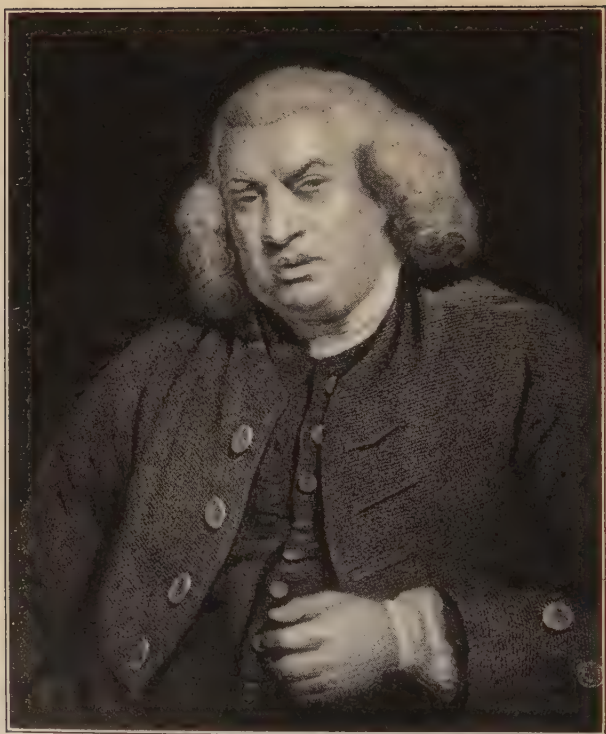
AUTOBIOGRAPHY—The Life of George Eliot, by J. W. Cross (1885)

LITERARY PORTRAIT—Imaginary Portraits, by Walter H. Pater (1887)

—Memories and Portraits, by Robert Louis Stevenson (1887)

LETTERS—The Love Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (1899)

THE REMAINS OF A DEAD MAN'S
INDIVIDUALITY



DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON
After a painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds

III: THE REMAINS OF A DEAD MAN'S INDIVIDUALITY

§ 1

THE FORMS OF BIOGRAPHY

BIOGRAPHY has long been regarded as a maze without a plan. The unchallenged acceptance of this notion has served to forestall any effective effort to classify its materials or to set bounds to it as a type of expression. But the attempt to classify biographical forms meets only the usual difficulties encountered in determining any literary boundaries. In biography, it is true, the overlapping of forms, the loose application of terms by both biographers and autobiographers, and the use of whimsical titles all present serious obstacles to anything like a fixed and final sorting of this richly varied material. Yet, the examples of many eminent biographers and the tacit understanding of experienced biographical critics tend to give ground for certain distinc-

tions that need only be recognized and made more generally known to bring about a genuinely helpful classification and definition; and the result, I feel confident, will aid in the higher enjoyment and appreciation of biographical readings, as well as effect a more consistent appraisal of this kind of writing.

Over-refinement of classification is no more desirable here than it is in any other type of literature; but certain groupings and distinctions that may serve useful ends can be pointed out. In the first place, the terms "objective" and "subjective," though abused to such an extent that Ruskin wished to eliminate them from the language, are still needed to indicate the two most obvious aspects of biography. Thus, in general, such writings as have the author's own experiences and observations as a basis are spoken of as *subjective*, or autobiographic; while those which deal exclusively with the material furnished by the lives of others than the writers are *objective*, or biographic. The term "biography," however, is usually made to perform a double office: while in one sense it is antithetic to the word "autobiography," for want of a

differentiating expression we include under it at another time all the forms of autobiography as well as those of pure objective biography. So, likewise, the term "autobiography" represents at one time a particular form of life-writing in which the author tells the story of his own life, while at others it is used as a general term for a variety of subjective forms. And in addition to distinguishing the two general departments of the subject, each of these terms is used in a narrower sense, to indicate a particular subdivision of its department.

While a large number of biographies attempt to give no special viewpoint in the titles, some suggestion of the nature of the materials and the particular emphasis of some phase of the life under consideration is indicated by such designations as "Life and Character," "Life and Opinions," "Life and Letters," "Life and Correspondence," "Life in the Letters," "Life and Writings," "Life and Times," "History of the Life," "Story of the Life." Frequently, however, there is just the non-committal title of "Life," "Biography," or, when a collection of short accounts is presented, "Lives." The life-

story, furthermore, may be an unpretentious "Biographical Sketch," "Literary Portrait," "Character Sketch," "Literary Silhouette," or simply a "Biographical Notice." The library shelves, too, are well laden with "Recollections," "Remembrances," "Reminiscences," "Memoirs," "Memorials," "Anecdotes," "Chronicles," and "Records," as well as with a few volumes of "Personal Memoirs" and "Personalia," and innumerable volumes that either are or should be entitled "Biographical Essays" and "Studies." On the side of self-biography we meet all sorts of combined titles with "Journals," "Autobiographies," "Diaries," subjective "Memoirs," "Confessions," "Apologies," "Letters," and more or less elaborately qualified "Journeys," "Voyages," and "Travels." The range is large and rich; but out of this great variety of titles we can get a common unit: it matters not what the angle of approach is, we are dealing with character and achievement, which we must see usually not as two things but as one, rarely to be separated into obverse and reverse.

§ 2

THE BIOGRAPHY AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

IT is a common tradition that biography was begotten by the vanity of men of letters. While there is little doubt that such has been the source of many of our life-stories, even some of the great ones, the desire to leave a record of one's life—implying, as it does, sufficient importance in the world of exceptional interests to create a demand for one's life-story—is certainly not confined to any one group of persons. The motives behind life-writing are quite varied. But a more or less definitely expressed desire for the indulgence of vanity and sentiment as the *primum mobile* of their work can be cited in the cases of Vasari, Casanova, Saint-Simon, Madame Roland, Cibber, Hans Andersen, and even Southey. But most objective biography is the result of such sentiment as that cherished by Boswell for the "Great Moralist," when the undertaking becomes a work of love and enthusiasm instead of a task, dutiful or otherwise. It was no doubt the inspiration of his subject that

raised Boswell, despite the contemporary view of him as a vain, loquacious fop, to the recognized position of "the prince of biographers."

The idea of recording the story of an individual's life, whatever may have been the motives, is one common to all times and peoples; but the notion that such records may be grouped under a general name is of comparatively recent date. Men's thoughts along the line of life-writing, so far as seeing any general principles in it is concerned, appear to have been about as slow in crystallizing as the development of man's inventive genius was, according to Cowper, in the conception of the sofa. It was not, indeed, until the seventeenth century that the word "biography" was introduced into the English language as the history of an individual's life. The term was first used by Dryden, whose appreciation of literary types was always exceptionally keen.

Biography, as the term has been variously interpreted since Dryden's day, with emphasis now on this and now on that view of the art, takes at times the form of a simple narrative confined to the *incidents* of the subject's life;

then, again, it is *the life-story against a well-furnished background*; or it may be an elaborate study, historically, socially, and psychologically, of the circumstances and conditions that throw light on the character and meaning of the life of the individual whose story is recounted. But more frequently, of course, the actual biographical product represents some sort of compromise of these three degrees of completeness with which the life may be treated. Such biography may bear only a simple title, such as Johnson's "Life of Savage"; but often some prominent biographical extension is indicated, as, for example, in "The Letters and Journals of Lord Byron: Narrated with Notices of His Life,"⁶ by Thomas Moore. The practice, moreover, has been common, since the days of Plutarch, to give a sort of collective treatment to groups of men and women in the simpler form of objective biography. Such collections as Suetonius's "Lives of the Cæsars," Vasari's "Lives of the Painters," and Johnson's "Lives of the Poets"³ illustrate the type of which the world seems never to grow tired, as evidenced by a continuous supply dealing with almost every conceiv-

able group of human beings who have anything in common.

After all is said pro and con, Boswell's "Life of Johnson"⁴ bids fair to remain the standard for what is purely biographic, though critics are not lacking who declare that even in the case of this very complete presentation one must read between the lines to get a real notion of what Johnson was like. Macaulay, at any rate, showed that the peculiar old figure could be looked at from at least one other point of view. Boswell's work, however, has done more toward standardizing modern notions of this type of biography than that of any other single biographer. Even the so-called "new biography," with its eminently proper emphasis on interpretation, is successful to the extent to which it utilizes Boswell's methods.

Indeed, any group of objective biographies representing the modern conception of life-writing, whether distinctively of the interpretative type or not, would likely show a heavy obligation to Boswell; if it were possible, the biographers themselves would doubtless be the first to acknowledge the debt. The best critical

estimates as to the successors worthy of association with Boswell as a biographer would doubtless show some marked differences of opinion. As representative of simple objective biography, nevertheless, it would be difficult to substitute for a list including Southey's "Nelson,"⁵ Moore's "Byron,"⁶ Lockhart's "Scott,"⁷ Stanley's "Arnold,"⁸ Carlyle's "Sterling,"¹⁰ Irving's "Goldsmith,"¹¹ Masson's "Chatterton,"¹³ Lewes's "Goethe,"¹⁵ Trevelyan's "Macaulay,"¹⁶ and Courthope's "Pope."¹⁷ It is very certain that some readers of biography will feel somewhat incensed at this or indeed any other list from which certain of their favorites are omitted; anyhow, if we can omit from our list the more recently published biographies, which we would have a tendency to magnify, and confine our selections to those biographies which exhibit special excellences for this type, we would perhaps be surprised to find how often these particular works would appear. If the list were doubled, there would be good grounds for including Morley's "Walpole," Corbett's "Drake," Fisher's "Napoleon," Belloc's "Marie Antoinette," Firth's "Cromwell,"

Monypenny's "Disraeli," Dowden's "Southey," Angellier's "Burns," Chesterton's "Dickens," and Lucas's "Lamb." These are at least sufficient to give a clear notion of what constitutes biography of the simple objective type, in which the chronological order in the main is followed and the purpose is fulfilled of setting forth the personality and achievements of the subject from the standpoint of another, rather than by the subject himself.

Unless exceptionally well written, a biography is generally regarded as heavier reading than an autobiography. The latter has usually that delightful ease so much cherished in the well-written letter, while the ordinary biography is apt to be somewhat formal. The term "autobiography" is frequently used as having only the meaning of "self-biography"; yet we miss in this general inclusion of all autobiographical forms as the accepted sense of the word a distinction which is insisted upon by the more careful autobiographers themselves. *The autobiography* is the simple, straightforward story of a life by the subject himself; of course, at its best it sets forth character and personality,

but it is primarily a narrative of the events of consequence in the writer's life, intended to picture the life of an individual. It is the counterpart to the biography, such as Franklin's "Autobiography"²¹ is to Southey's "Life of Nelson." When the subject has not thought it advisable to term his self-biography *autobiography*, it is because there is present, as a rule, more complex elements, such as may be found in definite types of diaries, journals, and memoirs, which may constitute well enough the material for an autobiography, but which frequently are not at all necessary to such a work. Amiel's "Journal,"⁷¹ however rich in character-revealing matter it is, has many features to distinguish it from the "Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Edward Gibbon." Despite its title, Gibbon's work is a typical autobiography, and is commonly so called, while Amiel's observations and reflections constitute in their essence a diary. They both furnish certain autobiographical material, but Gibbon's work is fundamentally a story of the author's life. In Amiel's case it was the *thought* rather than the *thinker* that occupied the writer's interest. Entirely different rea-

sons, therefore, from those concerned with giving the story of one's life may be present in autobiographical extensions. "The Greville Memoirs," for instance, are intended to present a picture of social and political conditions during the reigns of George IV and King William IV, and are only incidentally the autobiography of Charles Greville. So, too, Sainte-Beuve, an outstanding representative of the *mémoire*, particularly of its use as an objective form, has a historical rather than a biographical purpose in mind in his work.

It is, in fact, only within recent times that the *memoir* has come to have a personal suggestion. Autobiographies of the clearly individual life-story type, however, have been appearing with increasing frequency for centuries. Such an autobiography, for example, is Jerome Cardan's "The Book of My Own Life," which, published while Cellini's "Memoirs" were yet being circulated only in manuscript, stands out as a signal bit of self-study, full of good sense and free from the morbidity that later characterized so much of what might have been very charming autobiography. The autobiographies of Lord

Herbert of Cherbury and Benjamin Franklin are, however, sufficiently simple in purpose and method as to need no qualifying phrases. They are plain life-stories written by the subjects themselves, with a special vantage point of interpretation. Though the same intent, to give a simple story of a self-observer, is apparent in the actual material, a modified title is used for the word autobiography in the excellent examples of this kind of self-biography in Jean Paul's "Truth from My Own Life,"²³ George Sand's "The History of My Life,"²⁴ and Hans Andersen's "The Story of My Life."²⁵

Simple *biography*, then, when the term is used in the narrower, objective sense, is that phase of life-writing which tells the story of a man's life for the purpose of presenting what he did and what he was; and the usual biographical devices, such as letters, conversation, critical estimates, and the like, are made free use of. *Autobiography*, of a like simple type, and usually so named, has only those differences that must necessarily exist from the author's being the subject. Perhaps, after all is said, the change of pronoun is the greatest difference.

BIOGRAPHY:

§ 3

MEMOIRS AND DIARIES

THE "memoir" has been well defined as "biography in undress, the private, domestic, temperamental side of life, depicted from a near point of view, and not with the scientific aloofness of biography." It is obviously dependent for success upon an appreciation of the value of those little things that go to make up the lives of most people, and, as in the realm of letter-writing, is as effective as its intimate details appear to be unstudied. The best results are found in those specimens that are spontaneous and frank in the material presented.

It is essentially a study in personality. In this respect the French *mémoires* are incomparable. One might, indeed, search the whole range of literature to find a like picture to that which Eugénie de Guérin gives us in her "Journal"⁶⁹ of her essential character. Whatever might be the reader's disappointments, moreover, at some of the strange defects of his character, he cannot help feeling that he has made a contact with a striking personality in Amiel's "Journal In-

time.”⁷¹ It is interesting to recall in this connection the statement of Amiel’s Genevese friends, who called themselves the “editors” in the original *Avertissement* to the volume which they gave to the public, that the material of the “Journal” was written “with several ends in view.”

Amiel recorded in them [they stated] his various occupations, and the incidents of each day. He preserved in them his psychological observations, and the impressions produced on him by books. But his *Journal* was, above all, the confidant of his most private and intimate thoughts; a means whereby the thinker became conscious of his own inner life; a safe shelter wherein his questionings of fate and the future, the voice of grief, of self-examination and confession, the soul’s cry for inward peace, might make themselves freely heard. * * * The reader will find in it, *not a volume of Memoirs*, but the confidences of a solitary thinker, the meditations of a philosopher for whom the things of the soul were sovereign realities of existence.*

But “memoirs,” “diaries,” and “journals” are

* “The Journal Intime,” by Henri-Frédéric Amiel. Translated by Mrs. Humphry Ward. 2 volumes. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1907.

only the general and more frequently occurring terms for a variety of forms that show but a slight modification in the character of the contents and the methods of development. Among the title-terms of these variations, which bring up memories of an extensive biographical acquaintance, may be mentioned "memorials," "recollections," "reminiscences," "anecdotes," "chronicles," "records," and "memories." Not infrequently a mere desire for novelty of title, rather than an essential difference in the nature of the materials or the way of handling them, has dictated the choice of terms. For the most part the same terms are applied to both objective and subjective biographies of the memoir type. Some biographers, however, are insistent upon certain distinctions, but biography of this general content and character fails to maintain much that is consistent in usage. It is true that when the singular form of "memoir" is used it is practically synonymous with the term "biography," with the possible difference that the "memoir" occasionally indicates a less complete or minute account of a person's life. If the writer himself records his recollec-

tions, the choice of title is usually that of "memoirs."

In England the terms "recollections" and "reminiscences" have been more popular than any form of the word "memoirs." In general, the terms of English preference permit of greater freedom in the choice and arrangement of materials than is customary in the "memoir." "Reminiscences," too, represent more of a record of preferences and impressions, and tend to be more genial and chatty than has become the tradition with the more pretentious memoir. The cold severity of "The Greville Memoirs" ⁵⁵ contrasts strongly with the warm human qualities of the "Memories" ⁸² of Stevenson. The French and English viewpoints of these forms, too, are well illustrated in Daudet's "Recollections of a Literary Life" ⁵⁷ and Miss Mitford's delightful work of the same title.

Though the various biographical forms falling under the general head of memoirs are widely popular, it has been charged that the type rarely rises to the level of real literature. Yet, out of the nineteenth-century group of French *mémoires* alone, even when limiting the

selection to those of the largest claim to literary values, one would feel compelled to admit the unquestionable claims of the *mémoires* of Madame de Staël, Eugénie de Guérin, Béranger, de Musset, George Sand, Dumas, de Goncourt, and Renan to the plane of literature. And we would perhaps hesitate long before rejecting such productions as Cellini's "Memoirs" ⁴⁸ and the "Dichtung und Wahrheit" ⁵² of Goethe as below the level of genuine literature. There is some reason, moreover, for not being too categorical in the disposal of the English Defoes, Gaskells, Burneys, Froudes, Ruskins, and Müllers; while, in America, Thoreau's "Walden" ⁶⁵ and Audubon's "Journal of a Naturalist" ⁶⁷ appeal strongly to the general reader. The French *mémoires*, particularly in their eighteenth-century heyday, leaned at times, it is true, largely to the historical side; but the historical memoir may be rather sharply distinguished from the purely biographical memoir, particularly from the standpoint of possible literary values. The center of attention shifts from the politics of such a work as, say, Ludendorff's "Memoirs" to the personality of the masterpiece

of Benvenuto Cellini; and when to the latter clear picturization and skilful dramatic handling are added, as may be found in Silvio Pellico's "My Prisons,"⁵³ we have the distinctive product known as *the literary memoir*. Upon careful investigation, indeed, it is likely to be found that memoirs of genuine literary merit are perhaps as numerous as real literary achievements in most other departments of expression.

The "diary" is commonly confused with the memoir, very little distinction being made, indeed, either by readers or producers; yet the diary is much less generalized and usually not so pretentious. It shows, too, a less obvious intent to meet the public eye than most of the other forms of "memoirs"; and consequently produces an impression of sincerity too frequently lacking in many other biographic forms, such, for example, as the popular "Dichtung und Wahrheit." Even in the diary, if human values are to be made the principal consideration, it would not be Pepys or Evelyn that stands out as deserving of first mention, but rather such natural and unpretentious stories as that of the humble Fanny Burney and the youthful Marie

Bashkirtsev. There is no denying the value of Pepys's record as an interesting set of observations of the period in which he lived, and much of the praise bestowed upon him in this day of a Pepys revival is altogether deserving; but if one were to read the diaries of Pepys and Madame D'Arblay one after the other, he would understand that, *from the standpoint of biography*, Madame D'Arblay was a better self-observer than Pepys. It is the old story of the tendency to view the diary and its allied forms as primarily adjuncts to history, whether they are purely personal records or merely historical chronicles.

The prevalent notion of what this type of diary should be is perhaps well illustrated in Defoe's "Journal of the Plague Year."⁶⁶ While it has long been regarded as a literary classic of sufficient importance to justify its inclusion in various reading lists, and while it does indeed represent a certain important type of "journal," it shows too much of the journalistic tendency of present-day memoirs to make it acceptable as history rather than biography;

and few historians would be willing to rely wholly upon it as an adequate presentation of that interesting period. But when Defoe's work is compared with the "Journal"⁶⁹ of Eugénie de Guérin, with the intimate revelations of the very soul of the writer the latter succeeds in presenting, the difference between the diary as primarily source-material for history and the diary as biography can be seen with some emphasis. But there is apt to be some qualification of the claims of most of the specimens of so broad a type of biographical literature as "the diary" is; even Coleridge's "Biographia Literaria"⁶⁴ is too much of an intellectual exposition of certain literary and philosophical views to justify much enthusiasm for it as biography; while Thoreau's "Walden," as admirable as it is in many respects, dwells too much upon what the author saw, and gives too little of what he was, to permit of point to point comparison with the de Guérin "Journal" for ideal biographic values. It is rather in those diaries that give the little daily self-revelations which we feel we have a right to expect from

this type of biography that we find the essential life-writing viewpoint.

However careless and superficially chatty even the best of them may be at times, it is nevertheless through the memoir and its related forms that the world of the past is often more vividly repeopled than through the most carefully written histories. There is, of course, a wide difference between the poorest and the best, between the perfection of Cellini's and Madame Roland's records and the wretchedness of some of our current journalistic stuff; but undoubtedly no small share of the glory of biographical literature is comprised in the rich offering which the memoir gives. Our enthusiasm for many a brilliant period of a nation's life, such as eighteenth-century France, we owe to the graphic presentation of a memoir rage. "Secret memoirs," retaining their precious treasures hardly during the lifetime of their authors, reveal the hidden springs of conduct, the right motives to action, and the real consequences of character; they are indeed the remains of a dead man's individuality!

§ 4

THE LITERARY CONFESSION

WHILE all autobiographic forms are in a sense confessional in nature, the "literary confession" is autobiography *par excellence*. In the "confession," more so than elsewhere, we look for an unreserved revelation of the life of the subject, or at least some significant part of that life; and we expect the account to have a definite personal note, impressive because of its sincerity. The aim of the confession is to lay bare the inner life of the author, stressing, not so much events themselves, but rather the author's reactions to the events of his career—reactions that can never be authoritatively set forth except for this mode of preservation and presentation. So purely personal is the nature of the proposed act of confession that the term is not often applied, except when the author feels that he has gone even beyond the demands of ordinary self-biography.

But biographical works of this class are by no means confined to those bearing the title of "confession": many autobiographies, journals,

collections of letters, and even apologies, are not infrequently among biographical forms that deserve the term at least as a subtitle, though the writers may have avoided this more fitting title because of the obligation it carries or because of its biographical associations. Indeed, in any autobiographic undertaking actually laying the bare facts before the public, without an effort to lead to a particular conclusion, we have the essence of confession. We therefore find, appropriately grouped with the confessions of Augustine, Rousseau, De Quincey, and Coleridge, such apparently remote titles as the "Memoirs" ⁴⁸ of Benvenuto Cellini, the "Dichtung und Wahrheit" ⁵² of Goethe, the "Journal Intime" ⁷¹ of Amiel, the "Apologia pro Vita Sua" ⁴⁵ of Cardinal Newman, and even the "Love Letters" ³⁶ of Robert and Elizabeth Browning. In this last work, for example, we have the essential conditions of *character painting in the exact colors of life*—and of the life whose inner being is as frankly and fearlessly depicted as if it had been prefaced with the blatant claims of a Rousseau.

To distinguish the confession from other autobiographic forms, remembering that titles in

biography are frequently very unsafe guides, the spiritual element dominates all other characteristics of the life-story. In it we are considering, not so much the acts of the individual's life, but rather the secret springs to those acts and the resultant character, in the narration of which the author places himself on his honor to be utterly sincere. Nowhere must there be a suspicion of posing. This tendency, so obvious in most types of autobiography, is excluded only by a scrupulous endeavor to accomplish the real purpose of the confession and to make perfectly clear the relationship of the confession to the life of its author. De Quincey, for example, felt the obligation under which he made public his "Confessions of an English Opium Eater,"⁴² and, in the opening sentences of his characteristically pleasing preface to the original edition of 1822, gave his reasons for making so intimate a revelation public property:

I here present you, courteous reader [he takes occasion to state], with the record of a remarkable period of my life: according to my application of it, I trust that it will prove not merely an interesting record, but, in a considerable degree, useful and in-

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structive. In *that* hope it is that I have drawn it up; and *that* must be my apology for breaking through that delicate and honorable reserve which, for the most part, restrains us from the public exposure of our errors and infirmities.*

As a rule, those confessions serving some other purpose than a mere literary venture are superior as biography; there is less apt to be present the impression, so fatal to such an intimate undertaking as the writing of a wholly sincere confession, that here is something deliberately arranged for the eye of the public. It is safe to say, however, that if De Quincey's "Confessions" had not appeared until after his death, this charming work would not have had the emphasis laid on its literary elements and would not have been regarded so long as only incidentally a bit of self-biography. We have here, indeed, as we must have in all genuine confessions, more than the material for an autobiography; the presentation of the "naked, unblushing truth" of Gibbon is the truth of the innermost soul of the writer concerning things

* "Confessions of an English Opium Eater," by Thomas De Quincey. Masson's Edition.

that would not necessarily be treated at large in the "official biography."

But even in the case of genuine confessions, as evidenced in the best specimens that are conceded to satisfy more or less completely the demands of this type of life-writing, there are as wide differences in tone and purpose as are exemplified in other forms of autobiography. The contributions of Augustine and Coleridge, for example, are essentially *religious* confessions, and, as such, furnish the basic note of this particular form of self-biography; those of Cellini, Goethe, and De Quincey, however, have primarily a *literary* interest; while the whole spirit of the Brownings' "Love Letters,"³⁶ unintentionally but manifestly confessional, is as *romantic* as Amiel's great work is *philosophic*. And it is very certain, whether such purposes were present to the minds of these confessants or not, that Rousseau's deliberate effort is as *sensational* as it was intended to be. The Duchesse de Choiseul, who knew the "charlatan of virtue" well, gave as her opinion that he would go to the scaffold willingly if it would add to his celebrity. Notwithstanding their di-

versity of tone, these works are fundamentally confessional, as they evidence a sincere desire, though coupled with certain individual peculiarities, to get at the truth of the spiritual in the complex make-up of the subjects.

There is also a sort of defensive confession, represented by the "apology," in which the writer strives to set himself right in the eyes of the public, make his position in some important matter clear, or in one way or another explain a course of action as to which he thinks the world has a right to a first-hand explanation. There is, as might be expected, more of constraint in the apology, however, than is ordinarily found in the direct confession. Yet, the apology, like the confession, may at times take the form of a strictly autobiographic narrative, as in Newman's "Apologia pro Vita Sua." Unlike the exclusively subjective confession, however, the apology may propose to explain or excuse the course of conduct of another, as illustrated in Plato's "Apology," where the defense is represented as being made by Socrates himself. Colley Cibber reverses this relationship of author and subject in his "Apology for the Life

of Mr. Colley Cibber”⁴¹ and represents another as the author of his apology. It is, at any rate, necessary for us to rid ourselves of the general meaning of the term among us if we are to get its conception as applicable to life-writing; it implies in biography rather the notions of *justification* and *vindication*, somewhat in the way in which Justin Martyr uses it in his “Apologies” for the Christian faith.

It is worthy of note that the names of women are conspicuously rare as writers of autobiographies with this title; but their absence among the great confessants may, as a matter of fact, be due largely to accidents of titles; some of their memoirs touch closely on the true confession, such as those of Madame de Staël, which are certainly not far from the mark. Other autobiographic titles have appeared to appeal more strongly to feminine biographers; even the contemporaries and admirers of Rousseau have been drawn more strongly toward the less rigorous “*mémoire*.” The possibility of success in confessional writing, however, is found in their achievements in the realm of letter-writing. No one, moreover, could doubt that

Elizabeth Barrett Browning could have met the strictest demands of the confession, if her idealized confession, "Sonnets from the Portuguese,"⁹⁶ may be taken as a hint of her ability in this line. Anyhow, among men at least, Rousseau's challenge has been accepted so freely that such revelations have become almost a passion in our own day; among those who have met the requirements of the form, in spirit at least, may be mentioned Saint-Simon, Montaigne, Pascal, Flaubert, Heine, Tolstoy, Anatole France, Haydon, Mill, Spencer, and Pattison.

§ 5

THE LETTER AS BIOGRAPHY

THE practice of deluging the reading public with letters as biography appears to have had its beginning in England with the publication of the letters of Chesterfield, Cromwell, and Walpole. Since then we have not only recognized letters as a rich source of dependable biographic material, but find in them quite commonly the very essence of autobiography. The usual naturalness of style in familiar letters and the absence of effort to play up to an audience have

won for them an impression of sincerity—one of the strongest characteristics attainable in biography of any kind. Letters, indeed, from the days of Cicero to the time of the many-sided Stevenson, constitute the basis of much of our most positive knowledge of the play of character upon character. In biography, therefore, it is not uncommon to rely largely upon the letters of the subject, not only for support of opinion, but as a means of more directly presenting the picture for which the biographer is responsible, as may be attested by the titles of such successful life-stories as "The Life and Letters of Thomas Huxley," "The Life and Correspondence of Louis Agassiz," and "Charles Lever: His Life in His Letters."

The admirable achievement of Mr. Cross in writing the life of George Eliot largely from her letters shows how complete a revelation of an individual's life and character is possible in letters alone. But, indeed, George Eliot was so prolific a letter-writer that Mr. Cross found the undertaking less difficult than would often be the case. In his preface to "George Eliot's Life" ²⁸ he offers this statement:

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With the materials in my hands I have endeavored to form an *autobiography* (if the term may be permitted) of George Eliot. The life has been allowed to write itself in extracts from her letters and journals. Free from the obtrusion of any mind but her own, this method serves, I think, better than any other open to me, to show the development of her intellect and character.*

A similar success, I believe, might attend this method of presenting the autobiography of others of our great letter writers, free from the posing so common in self-biography. It is interesting in this connection to get the view of Cardinal Newman, as expressed in a letter to his sister:

It has been a hobby of mine [he declares], though perhaps it is a truism, and not a hobby, that the true life of a man is in his letters. * * * Not only for the interests of the biography, but for arriving at the inside of things, the publication of letters is the true method.

* "George Eliot's Life, as Related in Her Letters and Journals," arranged and edited by her husband, J. W. Cross. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1885.

The more charming letters have rarely been those of a practical sort, but rather letters intended solely as a form of entertainment. Spontaneity and the personal touch are the characteristics that give letters their wide appeal; but these qualities are likely to be lacking in correspondence of the more practical sort. The letters of Byron, for example, have been read with more enthusiasm by the public than they were perhaps by their first recipients. Both attitudes may be explained by the exceptional spontaneity of Byron's letter writing; he appears to have written them always in the mood of the moment, without considering how they might ultimately affect either himself or others. But we have many collections of letters of first-rate biographical value and literary interest in those of Lamb, FitzGerald, Kingsley, Walpole, Cowper, and Burns. The modern literary letter is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the letters of Stevenson.

However imposing the array of masculine letter writers may be made, their numbers, as in no less degree their effectiveness, may be paralleled by feminine writers who are in many

instances even more adept in this art. Woman's genius for sensing the value of such things, say, as social incidents and even the trivial domestic happenings of life, has given her an eminence in the writing of letters that may well be the envy of most men. The ability to present the things of common interest to humanity is in itself a possession of the greatest worth; and this ability is reflected not alone in the letter but in such closely related forms as the memoir, the diary, and the journal, in which woman has made her best contributions to biographical literature. For just such qualities the world accords to Madame de Sévigné and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu places superior to those that perhaps Lamb or Cowper might aspire to.

But perhaps the quality that makes the letter is nowhere better shown than in Lady Montagu's comment on reading the published volume of her French competitor's letters:

The last pleasure that fell in my way [she naïvely says in one of her letters] was Madame de Sévigné's letters; very pretty they are, but I assert, without the least vanity, that mine will be full as entertaining

forty years hence. I advise you, therefore, to put none of them to the use of waste-paper.*

The world has accepted her estimate of her work: if Madame de Sévigné is accorded the place of queen of the realm of epistolary correspondence, Lady Montagu is at least a claimant of the largest following. There are few charms that either of these may boast of as letter writers, however, that may not be duplicated in the delightful collections of Fanny Burney (Madame D'Arblay), Jane Austen, Jane Welsh Carlyle, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Louisa Alcott, and Christina Rossetti, all of whose lives, moreover, have been the inspiration of exceptional biography.

Though individual letters may at times have considerable biographical value, it is rather in such collections as Chesterfield's "Letters to His Son"³⁵ and "The Love Letters of Robert and Elizabeth Browning" that we have fairly complete stories of either the whole or a part of a life. In the Browning letters, for instance, we

* "Letters from the Right Honorable Lady Mary Montagu," edited by Ernest Rhys. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1906.

have a whole romance, which, so far as the period covered is concerned, presents the two characters about as completely as any other form of autobiography would likely succeed in doing. This collection represents all the letters that passed between the Brownings. As the filial editor stated in the preface to the first edition: "These are all the letters that ever passed between my father and mother, for they were never afterwards separated long enough to give excuse for a letter."

Letter writing, even according to the testimony of its most ardent exponents, has declined as an art; the practical has become so much more engrossing a consideration than the pleasing. Nevertheless, whether interest in this delicate art ever again becomes acute enough to make it a style, we still have the rich heritage of the periods in which it was thought worth while to contribute to the happiness and welfare of others in this way; and these intimate glimpses into the lives and characters of many a great man or woman furnish one more field for study and recreation for the biographically inclined. And even beyond the strict limits of biography itself,

we shall find that much of the best in *lettres* may be found in letters.

§ 6

THE BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

THOUGH essay-writing is regarded in some quarters as a form of literary dissipation, indicative, as alleged in the case of De Quincey, of a lack of power for sustained thought and effort, it is nevertheless, tritely enough to say, one of the most effective modes of expression for just those occasions that need only a partial presentation of a subject, such as an aspect of a life-story. Since Bacon and Montaigne made known the possibilities of this literary type, however, it has undergone, strange to say, little of the usual process of evolution common to most other types of literature. Emerson's "Essays," for instance, exhibit substantially the same manner found in the sixteenth-century productions of this kind. There has, however, been some notable branching out for material, as illustrated in the so-called historical essay.

In keeping with the same spirit that reduced

the romance and the two- or three-volume novel to the short story, the early part of the nineteenth century saw the popularization of the historical essay as a form of biography. It is usual to assign as the date of its beginning the appearance of Macaulay's "Essay on Milton."⁷² Such essays were at first nominally reviews, particularly of books; later, however, they became quite commonly appreciations of character and achievement, as, for example, in the works of Stephen, Pater, Bagehot, and Lowell. Most of the last century's essay writers, as a matter of fact, furnish their full quota of such productions—essays in criticism, appreciations, "studies," as they were variously called.

The "biographical essay," a title which its predominant characteristics soon made necessary, in point of material represents an extension of the essay idea even beyond the daring departure of this kind so frequently introduced in "The Spectator," where the appeal of the descriptive and narrative made apparent the possibilities of the essay for purposes of biography. While the excuse of reviewing a new volume gave to such writers as Macaulay and Carlyle the opportunity

of setting forth their views on certain misconceived or neglected aspects of an author's life or work, the book under consideration furnished only a cue, and, in most cases, gave only a starting point; the biographical element rather than the art product became for the most part the center of interest. This type of essay not infrequently became a brief historical treatise, but with this distinctive feature: it was usually a simple matter to recognize the author in the essay.

Of no little moment is the observation, that the author has the opportunity to express in the biographical essay his own personality to a greater extent than would be legitimate in any other form of objective biography. It is indeed a well-recognized canon of biography writing that the more completely the author submerges his own personality the more nearly he reaches the goal of the ideal biography of the objective type. But even when the aim is clearly recognized as that of a delineation of the resulting character of the subject as a living unity, instead of making prominent the author's reactions to the subject, the writer of this form of biography

can still place the emphasis where he feels it should be placed or stress a neglected point without apology. Matthew Arnold thus does the admirers of Gray a service, in his delightful essay on the poet, when he gathers around the words of Gray's executor, "He never spoke out," the most significant part of Gray's history, both as a man and as a poet. This freedom with which the author can deal with his material constitutes a special charm for the writer of the biographical essay. And if the essay tends toward the subjective, as it frequently does, there is not the same feeling here as elsewhere that the author has violated one of the proprieties.

Each subject has, usually, a particular field in which his personality largely manifests itself. Pater gives a suitable illustration of this keynote principle in biographical writing of this kind in his "Appreciation of Charles Lamb." The author of "Elia" is here presented as a sort of "visible interpretation and instance of humor." Benson, the biographer of Pater, states that the critic, his subject, "has seen the innermost heart of the man with the insight that only affection can give, an insight which subtler and



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harder critics seem to miss, even though the picture they draw is incontestably truer in detail." Lamb's work is, in reality, often in the nature of confessions, dealing with the author's tastes, sympathies, and affections, reflecting strongly his humorous personality. One can readily understand, therefore, why Lamb's life and work so frequently have lent themselves to this form of treatment; there seems always a key to interpretation and a form in which to present it.

The main dependence for the material for interpretative biographical sketches lies in the journals, letters, and other autobiographical articles which the subject has left; these, in the absence of personal knowledge, must constitute the basis for independent judgment. But the usual reason for the essay is found in actual or fancied desiderata in the biography, the biographer's failure to bring out the essential thing, as the essayist sees it, in the life of the subject. This is the point of Froude's accomplishment in his "Sketch of Cæsar"⁸³; the conflicts in even the contemporary records of the greatest of the Romans obscured the picture and gave some grounds for the most divergent views. Though

pretending only to an outline drawing, by using the unifying method of the biographical essay Froude secured what is believed to be a more authentic interpretation than was made by the earlier biographers who aimed to present a complete portrait. At any rate, the picture which he has drawn in this way has passed into general acceptance as the real Julius Cæsar, as our more recent biographers would term it.

The many difficulties that confront the writer of biographical sketches are set forth by Stevenson in the preface to his "Familiar Studies of Men and Books":

The writer of short studies, having to condense in a few pages the events of a whole lifetime, and the effect on his own mind of many various volumes, is bound, above all things, to make that condensation logical and striking. For the only justification of his writings at all is that he shall present a brief, reasoned, and memorable view. By the necessity of the case, all the more neutral circumstances are omitted from his narrative; and that of itself, by the negative exaggeration of which I have spoken in the text, lends to the matter in hand a certain false and specious glitter. By the necessity of the case, again, he is forced

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to view his subject throughout in a particular illumination, like a studio artifice. Like Hales with Pepys, he must nearly break his sitter's neck to get the proper shadows on the portrait. It is from one side only that he has time to represent his subject. The side selected will either be the one most striking to himself, or the one most obscured by controversy; and in both cases that will be the one most liable to strained and sophisticated reading. In a biography, this and that is displayed; the hero is seen at home, playing the flute; the different tendencies of his work come one after another into notice; and thus something like a true general impression of the subject may at last be struck. But in the short study, the writer, having seized his "point of view," must keep his eye steadily to that. He seeks, perhaps, rather to differentiate than truly to characterize. The proportions of the sitter must be sacrificed to the proportions of the portrait; the lights are heightened, the shadows overcharged; the chosen expression, continually forced, may degenerate at length into a grimace; and we have at best something of a caricature, at worst a calumny.

The child is father to the man; but only the biographical details that carry over and have a bearing upon the personality and temperament of the man are needed in the restricted treat-

ment demanded for the biographical essay. Emerson's "Representative Men,"⁷⁵ as well as Carlyle's "Heroes,"⁷⁴ were selected because of certain outstanding powers and achievements; how they came by these traits and how they gained their successes are pertinent to the purpose for which they are held up to the world; all else may well be omitted. Macaulay, for instance, has been censured for omitting many important details in the life of his subject, in his memorable "Essay on Milton"; but the author's purpose, whether formulated or not, had to do with only two aspects of Milton's career: Milton's theory of poetry and his relation to the Puritan Movement. To say what he felt on these two topics, as they are related to both his own and his subject's views, was the obvious purpose of the essay; the discovery of the Milton manuscript furnished merely the occasion; and the other facts of Milton's life, in so far as they are used at all, constitute only supplementary matter needed to give the essay a sort of continuity.

The advantage of a partial treatment of an individual's life in this loose but purposeful

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way has been too great to escape the attention of many of our greatest critics of life and literature; hence, connected with this form of special pleading in biography is a brilliant group of essayists. Not only De Quincey, Pater, Bagehot, and Stephen, but men like Lowell and Dowden have felt its possibilities and have left contributions of great value. With just the liberty of presenting with varying degrees of completeness what he needs of the life of an individual, and with the privilege of mingling with perfect propriety his personal views and temperamental outlook, the popularity of the biographical essay, from the standpoint of the writer, is not far to seek. What, in aim and structure, would be impertinence in most biographical undertakings becomes here an actual merit. It is easy, therefore, to account for its century-old grip on the human greediness of biography.

§ 7

THE LITERARY PORTRAIT

FROM the time of the publication of Sainte-Beuve's "Portraits of the Eighteenth Cen-

tury”⁸⁰ (1857-1862), there has grown into steadily increasing prominence a type of biographical sketching that is quite happily termed “the literary portrait.” The aim of such portraiture is to do for the *character* of a person much of what the painter in colors does for the physical features: to make the individual, certainly as he was known to his fellow-men, if not as he actually was in himself, stand out before our mind’s eye. But the undertaking constitutes far more than mere “biographical sketching,” as the term is popularly understood; the result must be a life like picture, and to effect this, contrary to the prevalent notion of “sketching,” implies the subordination of incidents to traits.

As a biographical title, the literary portrait usually suggests a treatment of more or less brevity, and one that depends for its effectiveness upon graphic delineations of keynote qualities in the temperamental make-up of the person described. The narrative element, while commonly subordinated to either direct or indirect description, usually maintains the chronological order of events. The outward facts of

the life selected for treatment are those that are typical, as it is the sum total of character rather than the story of a life that is the particular end aimed at. Even in the descriptive details no attempt is made to introduce more than is necessary to present a distinct outline. It is not uncommon, however, to paint the more elaborate portraits, as Abbey did his "Holy Grail" in the Boston Public Library, in a series of panels, each section depicting an important episode or a group of significant characteristics in the life of an individual. Such, for example, if I may again refer to it, is Barrie's method in his "Margaret Ogilvy,"⁸⁵ wherein the author has succeeded completely in presenting to our hearts and minds the character of his subject, certainly at least as he saw it.

Pater, too, has admirably carried out the spirit of this biographical form in his imaginary portrait of "Marius the Epicurean."⁸¹ Yet portrait painting is a difficult thing to do well. Shairp, for instance, expressed his inability to do justice to the very real character of Thomas Erskine in a sketch of this kind. He justifies his failure, in his "Portraits of Friends," in the

words of Dr. MacLeod Campbell to Bishop Ewing, uttered shortly after Mr. Erskine's death. "No man," says Dr. Campbell, "is able to say to those who knew him not, what he was; no man could say this to those who knew him, in a way that they would feel satisfying." I am sure, however, that the character of Stevenson's mind was such as would have enabled him to do well what Shairp found impossible; as clear-cut a personality as Erskine's was would have been as wholly biographic to Stevenson, if we may judge from the admirable success of "Memories and Portraits,"⁸² as it seemed to be abiographic to his fellow-countryman. To the Paters, the Barries, and the Stevensons, and others equally gifted, we owe, at any rate, through portrait presentations some of our best and most modern conceptions of life-writing, with the preëminent quality of being just to the subjects. It appears to me very probable, indeed, that the Brontës, for instance, have become endeared to the world more largely through the portrait presentation of their charming characters than through any other biographical means. But the Brontës offered just

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that picturesque type of material and the right sort of character values that lend themselves most readily to portraiture.

Some of the obligations, however, under which the biographer rests in most life-writing undertakings are less binding in literary portraiture, as the biographer makes no pretense to the use of other biographical data than that which is sufficiently characteristic and habitual to enable him to present a reasonable but sympathetic interpretation, such as Carlyle made for Burns. Yet this very freedom involves a heavy obligation in itself: there must be no mistaking what is characteristic and what is not. But writers of biographic history have learned from the authors of historical romance that imagination, too, has its place in dealing with facts as well as fiction. Some of the truest biography of the portrait type is found in historical fiction or the recent fictional vogue of presenting certain prominent figures in the fields of history or art. Scott's portrait of Queen Elizabeth in "Kenilworth," for instance, is regarded as perhaps the best pastel we have of the great queen. And Byron and Shelley, of course, have made

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the appeal of strong personalities, with the added attraction of misfortune and fancied injury, and have recently had the stories of their dubious careers retold with fictional purposes, but with the notion of presenting a definitely outlined portrait in each case.

The rather recent practice of rewriting old biographies for the purpose of presenting "The True Mr. So-and-So," as in Ford's "The True Benjamin Franklin," relies upon the essential features of the literary portrait. Especially when the earlier biographies are felt to be perversions, this type furnishes an easy method of setting the objectionable material straight for the satisfaction of those most nearly concerned. A more or less valid reason for a portrait is found, too, in the dissatisfaction occasioned by the omission of material believed to be important for the ends of true biography. However, the first impression in biography, as in most other affairs of life, is likely to be the lasting one. Griswold's Poe, for example, is still the popular conception of the poet, though, it seems highly probable, a very erroneous one. Never-

theless, indignation occasioned by Griswold's story is still the source of frequent corrected biographies of the portrait type. Revised biographies have, at times, corrected mistaken attitudes: Carlyle's "Life of Cromwell"⁹ actually reversed the world's opinion of this British hero.

The "literary portrait," with what it involves of the "new biography," has indeed become our biographic passion; and it is an eminently healthy sign. Under the leadership of Gamaliel Bradford it has been elevated to a biographical type of great importance. In general, for many of the most vivid character pictures, whether we modify the term to "memories," "sketches," "vignettes," "psychographs," or present them under some whimsical title or simply as "John Smith," we are indebted to the technique of what we now by common consent call the "literary portrait." In the best of them, usually, a great personality is painted with just that background needed to make the character stand out; and this is, after all, the important function of all true biography.

THE LITERATURE OF TRAVEL

RECORDS of travel belong to the domain of taste and philosophy. In their biographical relations such records exhibit an intimate connection between the written product and the character of the author. This is indeed exactly what might be expected from a conscientious report of significant experiences, as there is no limitation to the assurance that the measure of what one gets from the world about him is accurately gauged by what one is prepared to get. The traveler, above all, is the man of one talent or the man of ten: the degree in which he receives from his experiences is always directly proportionate to what he already possesses.

It is a far cry from Widsith to the modern travel guides; yet travel literature, reflecting the spirit of adventure and high emprise, claims among its exponents names that grace the pages of literature from the days of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers to our era of North Pole adventurers. The records of voyagers and travelers

exhibit the extremes of the mingled fictions of a Mandeville and the placid "Inland Voyage" of a Stevenson. And our racial trait of *Wanderlust*, with its devious paths, is paralleled by no less an urge to make known one's experiences than to gather these adventures first hand, and the methods of presenting them are as varied as the adventures themselves.

Just as the Englishman's educational period abroad has been looked upon as scarcely less important than his university residence, so, too, we are inclined everywhere to accept the notion that one's formal education should be "finished" by travel. This high regard for the privilege of contact with other peoples and institutions is based upon the evident benefits derived from such experience, as recounted in the works of reputable men who have told these experiences in such compelling ways as to influence others. These writings, dealing with incidents, observations, and inferences on the part of people who have busied themselves going about the world, peering into every nook and corner for something new and worthwhile, are essentially biographical in nature; the narrator is inter-

ested in what he reports usually because of its personal appeal. And with the truth of history and the interest of fiction, the everlasting verities of human nature, consciously or unconsciously recorded, enable these records to take as strong a hold on our minds as many of the most comprehensive and appealing life-stories are wont to do. Whatever other interests they may have, that which stands out is fundamentally biographical.

While in a general way dependent upon knowledge, the real success of this type of biographical writing, particularly from the point of continued popularity, is contingent upon the point of view, descriptive powers, and the talent and spirit of the author. Egotism, so essential to much of the best in other forms of biography, is, however, fatal here. "Childe Harold," indeed, might have been a worthy idealization of this form of biography, had it not been for this trait, so inevitable in the more ambitious works of Byron. Though less a traveler, Tennyson, on the other hand, has caught the spirit of this type of adventurer; he expresses it admirably in his "Ulysses":

THE LITERATURE OF PERSONALITY

For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known,—cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honored of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untraveled world, whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

There is no questioning the qualifications, except the very important one of veracity, which Sir John Mandeville exhibits in his very lively narrative of an English traveler's experiences in the East. While much that he has to recount

in his "Travels" ⁸⁷ is, to say the least, open to question, he nevertheless interests us as well in the biographical bearings of his work as in his imaginary observations. The book is a compilation intended originally as a guide to pilgrims to the Holy Land, but the compiler is also a representative of the traveler of his day, whose individuality shines through many even of his most amusing stories. As somewhat more authentic, however, Humboldt's "Travels" and Cook's "Voyages," time-honored representatives of this class of writings, likewise well indicate the general autobiographic tenor which travels, as such, show. Such works, while of necessity somewhat descriptive of outer things, reflect, nevertheless, a world as seen through the eyes of the writers, and deal with events as they unfold themselves in those writers' experiences. While there is geography, history, science, and what not in the record, it must remain, even with all these elements, primarily a personal story, in which the life and character of the writers are the important considerations.

Travel literature shows, likewise, a wide range of tone as well as of material. The

"Travels" ⁸⁶ of Marco Polo and Mungo Park's "Travels in the Interior of Africa" ⁸⁹ stand in marked contrast with the quiet stylistic beauty of Irving's "Sketch Book." The latter is perhaps too much of an idealization for a book of real travel, especially as compared with such sincere travel records as, for example, Darwin's "Voyage of the Beagle." It is doubtless, after all, from the near-literature of travel, such as De Quincey's "Revolt of the Tartars," Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister's Wanderjahre," or Sterne's "Sentimental Journey," that we get the best hints of the literary possibilities of this form of self-biography. Stevenson's "Travels with a Donkey" and "An Inland Voyage," like Thoreau's "A Week on the Concord and Merrimac," are too literally "literary excursions" to make a profound impression as "travels." Heine's "Die Harzreise" ⁹¹ and Parkman's "Oregon Trail," however, are convincing as real travel records, and lack little of the interest and value of lively fiction.

But tastes change in travel literature more quickly, apparently, than in other forms of biography. As popular as they once were, few

people now read Johnson's "Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides," Montaigne's "Italy," or Volney's "Voyages." Even Bayard Taylor's "Views Afoot," Irving's "Astoria," Madame de Staël's "Italy," and de Tocqueville's "America," once devoured as greedily as current fiction is with us, now elicit only the dutiful attention of the literary historian. Among those that have become more or less classic, however, may be mentioned the records of Marco Polo, Mungo Park, Cook, Hakluyt, Jules Verne, and perhaps Du Chaillu, Stanley, and Livingstone. Practically the remotest corners of the earth have now been visited and revisited and minute records of these visits have been made and as promptly given to the public; travel records have assumed, indeed, the importance of at least a distinct subdivision of literature. But the book of yesterday's sensation is quickly superseded by today's "more up-to-date report"; and, accordingly, even the Stoddards, the Roosevelts, and the Pearys must give place to the Amundsens, the Byrds, and the Beebes. The same practical ends of extending human knowledge and control, however, are kept steadily in view.

Yet there is a species of travel literature in which the spiritual is more prominent than what we are usually inclined to regard as practical. Wordsworth's "Excursion," De Quincey's "Mail Coach," and Goldsmith's "Traveler," for example, must be read from other motives than those that attract the lover of racy incidents connected with some expedition of a scientific nature. But it is not at all necessary that travel books should have the excitement of the "Tarzan" stories, or that the practical should be confined to the material conquests. In fact, the best traditions of travel literature are exemplified in such a work as Laurence Hutton's "Literary Landmarks," in which the quiet appeal of the literary essay is more marked than the usual elements which we associate with any sort of story, whether it be an actual record or a fiction. The spiritual, too, is more prominent when travel records take the form of letters, an intimate method of presentation which loses none of its value because it is apparently unstudied.

Travel literature, then, may at times swing far away from the biographical and be little

more than an essay or a fiction only slightly grounded on fact, yet, in the main, it belongs to personal record and is identical with much of the essential in autobiography, as a part of the writer's life-story: in all important points it is one with successful biography.

§ 9

BIOGRAPHICAL POETRY

ALL literature is, of course, in some sense biography. "It is a mistake," says Taine, "to study the document as if it were isolated." Many of our greatest masterpieces of literature, indeed, stand in such relation to the lives of their creators as to make it impossible to understand them fully apart from the circumstances from which they took their rise. But perhaps nowhere else is the relationship of the literary product to its author more evident than in lyric poetry, when such poetry is rightly understood; in fact, much of the very best of it, sad to say, could be gathered under the De Quincey title of "*Suspiria de Profundis*." Far oftener, in truth, than appears on the surface, even

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The foam-flakes that dance in life's shallows
Are wrung from life's deep.

We think it in no way strange that a collection of letters should pretty well portray the individual, yet we are not accustomed to the notion, usually no less true, that the collected poems of, say, a great lyricist, such as a Byron or a Shelley, present hardly less completely the character of the man as well as the artist. Even had Byron been less inclined to become his own hero, nevertheless his own feelings, aspirations, hopes, and fears would naturally have become the motifs of lyric expression. So, whether it is in mere "Childish Recollections," an experience with the "Maid of Athens," or even in the vision of a happy death, as expressed in "Euthanasia," the same impulsive, restless soul is present. Burns and Wordsworth illustrate particularly well the advantage of having the biographic facts of their important productions within reach of the serious reader, in that they draw their material largely from their environment. Indeed, when read against the biographical background, "A Mountain Daisy" becomes much more than a glorified common

wild flower and "Tintern Abbey" even is no mere ancient ruin as seen through the eyes of a poet. With the man's answer, in "One Word More," to the frank portrayal of a life of love given in "Sonnets from the Portuguese,"⁹⁶ though not the usual mode for the generally accepted facts of biography, we have pages out of the life-history of two people.

Poets have apparently been little inclined to write what we commonly call autobiographies. Tennyson, for instance, no doubt felt that there was little more needed for him to say, after his "Crossing the Bar"; his whole life had been one of self-characterization and self-revelation. Certain it is that "In Memoriam"⁹⁵ amply covers the spiritual history of that period of his life between the death of Arthur Hallam and his appointment to the laureateship. His great elegy is not only a memorial to his friend, but it is also a spiritual autobiography of Tennyson, in that it represents a sincere portrayal of a soul rising from the depth of despair to the vantage ground of spiritual calm and clarity. The great elegists, from Milton to Swinburne, are, in fact, no slight contributors to the litera-

ture of biography. They have given not only the details of the lives of those whom they have chosen to celebrate in this way, but they have also revealed themselves in these same monuments which they have erected to others. And what is true of the elegist is true in varying degrees of all lyric poets. Their province is, indeed, that of expressing their emotional reactions to the actual experiences of their lives.

But poets have not infrequently given us works of a deliberate biographic intent. In Wordsworth's "Prelude,"⁹⁷ for example, the author tells us that "he undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, so far as he was acquainted with them." "The Excursion," which, with the "Prelude," was designed as part of a larger work to be entitled "The Recluse," is on the whole an autobiographical poem of a philosophic turn, "having as its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement." Verse was here used because it was the easiest and most natural mode of expression for the poet; but his object was to give a careful self-

study to his preparation for the high office of poet.

But why multiply instances of poems of a more or less distinct biographic nature? As autobiographies they rest, of course, under the blight of idealized productions intended for publication. Yet they support the point that in them we find a history of the inner soul, and that on the whole they express the biographic idea.

§ 10

SOME MINOR FORMS OF BIOGRAPHY

SEVERAL briefer forms of a biographical nature are in constant use, though they do not attempt anything like a full length portrait of a subject. Such familiar terms will suggest themselves as "personals," "obituaries," "epitaphs," "caricatures," "lampoons," and "libels." They may aim merely at the presentation of some striking phase or even incident of a life, or may require, after the manner of the biographical essay, an intensive treatment of a limited aspect of the life-story; or the outstanding

facts, briefly stated, may be what is needed. Though frequently containing oblique views and serving too often only the writer's ends, they are, nevertheless, in essence biographical.

The "obituary," for instance, requires usually only the outline of the more important facts in the life of the deceased, or such material as may be suitably preparatory to a short essay on the character of the departed. But there is no justification for drawing very sharply any limits in the amount of material that may be used; at times, indeed, the "obituary notice" extends to the length of a biographical sketch. It is taken ordinarily simply as a published notice of a death.

The "sketch" itself, however, may vary from the single paragraph treatment of the briefer dictionaries of biographical reference to a full length biography. Sketching, as in Froude's "Sketch of Julius Cæsar,"⁸³ sometimes runs into the portrait idea, though more usually it is confined to such a biographical outline as is commonly found in the introduction to an author's works. Such brief biographical introductions may

emphasize the brevity of treatment by the title "biographical notice." With the earlier reviewers of the days of Christopher North and Jeffrey, biographical sketches not infrequently took the tone of "lampoons." The ridicule heaped upon Byron in the nominal review of his first volume of poems, it will be recalled, occasioned the spirited reply of the "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." Macaulay, too, was inclined to the use of the methods of the Scottish reviewers, as is illustrated, for example, in his sketch of Horace Walpole, written upon the publication of "The Letters of Horace Walpole." In his most caustic style, Macaulay "sketches" Walpole as "a bundle of inconsistent whims and affectations."

As one may perhaps suspect from some of Macaulay's alleged reviews, it is no uncommon thing for a reviewer to "caricature" his subject, in order to reflect glory upon the author of the review. It is but a short step, moreover, for such caricatures to degenerate into pure "libels." Lampoons, caricatures, and libels, of course, have real point in biography only in so far as they touch the character and personality of their

intended victims. All types of ridicule, however, may be of considerable interest to the specialist in biography; though they may lack the important element of sympathy needed in the highest type of constructive biography-writing, they at least have the merit of tending to do away with the more obvious types of posing; this function of a check on oblique biography-writing by a certain type of biography itself makes these reviews worth while. The easy submission of Keats to the destructive criticism of a reviewer is, at any rate, no longer the order of the day: the impunity with which Macaulay belabored the authors of his time, and the prerogative of the Edinburgh reviewers to destroy what they did not like, are privileges rarely exercised by the critics of the present day. There is a court of appeal even against unjust reviewers that may be called to exercise its jurisdiction in behalf of the adventurer in art.

Thackeray's cynical vein was much enjoyed by those of his contemporaries who did not happen to become the objects of his special attention. It was natural that the humor of this hater

of snobbery should find a congenial outlet in the biographical sketch. "The English Humorists" ⁷⁹ was undoubtedly a work of love on the part of its author: his subjects and his methods undoubtedly suited his tastes and inclinations. The spirit of the work of Charles Lamb, however, in the handling of these briefer biographical forms shows that the harsh and cynical attitude is not essential to success here. For sweet, quaint humor, indeed, there is little in our literature that surpasses some of the "Essays of Elia." Can one imagine Thackeray treating the theme of "My Relations" in such a way as to leave it in the heart of the world, where it now occupies a place? Lamb's ability to make a success of these briefer biographical forms is well indicated in his "Dream Children." Here we have a personal reverie of two very dear people in the life of the author; in the effect secured, as well as the fact that it is a real bit of life-writing, it is undoubtedly a rare accomplishment in the presentation of the ethereal in life and character.

With "anecdote," "personalia" belongs to the biographical forms that are of greatest use

as illustrative material to the complete biography. Yet there is, of course, an independent value in material of this nature as supplementary matter to the standard life-story of additional anecdotes, hitherto unpublished letters, newly recovered manuscripts, and such other material as might have found its way in the biography proper. However many life-stories the reader may have come into touch with, relating to the life of the poet, he would still find Gosse's "Personalalia of Robert Browning"¹⁰⁰ of charm and value for its own sake as biography. Here, as is generally the case in such an addendum to biography, the numerous little facts, stories, and incidents, gathered under the head of anecdotes and personalalia, constitute the added value almost of personal contact, too often lacking in the longer and more pretentious treatments of a life. As closely related to this notion of personalalia, but sometimes constituting sufficient material for independent presentation, "table talk" is of significance as biography; it is sometimes clearly illustrative of the real mind of the man, without the interference of an interpreter. If ample enough, it may, in fact, con-

stitute a highly satisfactory intellectual self-biography.

Even the inevitable "personals" of the society column, as constant reminders of the persistent interest in character and conduct, are not without elements of biographical values. It is perhaps in their extensions as "impressions," "traits," "estimates," or "appreciations" that we see more clearly their more significant biographical bearings; yet, even the "personal" has a relationship to the life of an individual, indicative of what he is or of some situation or achievement that shows character values, such as to justify its inclusion in the minor forms that may be termed "biographical." Indeed, whatever the miniature sketch or brief critique may be entitled, if its intent is to depict even a brief moment or two of a life, it is to that extent the basis of biography. So, even the "personals," however limited the situation may be that they bring to our minds, must carry with them at least the force of the term itself.

The applications of the various biographical titles current among us, while not very restricted, are perhaps more systematic than chem-

ical nomenclature was a half century ago. Yet when the need for definition and classification was sufficiently felt in science, the specialists saw to it that an adequate, clear-cut system was provided, sufficient even for international understanding. The lack of standards that has given to biography the freely used opportunity to exercise mere whim in the choice of titles has resulted in much confusion; in the usage of the more careful critics, however, there are more specific terms than the uninitiated are aware of; and the apparent overlapping of forms will be found upon more careful investigation to be quite largely a matter of carelessness on the part of biographers themselves. While it is not possible to put final boundaries to a living, growing thing, yet the confusion in biographical nomenclature is more apparent than real—and, after all, is only such as biography shares with most other departments of literature. A more careful discrimination in the use of certain terms, however, as far as they convey the distinctive principles of special forms of biography, would, I believe, make for a more intelligent appreciation and enjoyment of the art of life-writing.

BIOGRAPHY:

It is at least difficult to conceive of a clear-cut philosophy of biography without a more systematic use and understanding of classifying terms.

A TABLE OF BIOGRAPHIC FORMS

BIOGRAPHY

I. Mainly Subjective—The Author Pictures His Own Life and Character

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Autobiography Proper
- (c) Confessions
- (d) Diaries
- (e) Journals
- (f) Letters—Especially as Collections
- (g) Special Titles of Autobiographic Intent
- (h) Table-Talk, as a Sort of Intellectual Confession
- (i) "Truth from My Own Life" Types

II. Either Subjective or Objective—As the Author Pictures His Own or Another's Life.

- (a) History of a Life, The
- (b) Memoir, Mémoires, Memoirs
- (c) Recollections
- (d) Records
- (e) Remembrances

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- (f) Reminiscences
- (g) "Story of a Life" Types
- (h) Whimsical Titles, in Which the Relationship of the Subject and Author Are Usually Shown by Subtitles

III. Chiefly Objective—The Author Tells the Story of Another's Life

- (a) Biography Proper
- (b) Caricatures
- (c) Essays, Biographical
- (d) Lampoons and Libels
- (e) Life
- (f) "Life and Character" Types
- (g) Lives for Group Biographies
- (h) Memorials
- (i) Personalia
- (j) Personals
- (k) Portraits—Literary Portraits
- (l) Sketches and Silhouettes—Vignettes
- (m) "True So-and-So" Types

A READING LIST

Nothing can take the place of wide reading for an understanding of the nature, scope, and arrangement of the material in biography. In

BIOGRAPHY:

addition to the biographies listed in previous sections, therefore, the following groups are offered as illustrative of the various forms of biographical literature:

BIOGRAPHY

- The Life of Nelson, by Robert Southey (1813)
Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Baronet,
by John G. Lockhart (1837-1839)
The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold, by
Arthur P. Stanley (1844)
The Story of Goethe's Life, by George Henry Lewes
(1872)

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

- The Autobiography of Herbert of Cherbury, Lord
Edward (1583-1648)
Truth from My Own Life, by Jean Paul Richter
(1763-1823)
The History of My Life, by George Sand (1804-
1876)
The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill (1873)
The Education of Henry Adams, by Henry Adams

LETTERS

- The Letters of Junius (1769-1772)

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The Letters of Lamb, Walpole, and Cowper

CONFESSIONS

The New Life, by Dante (1307)

Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, by Col-
ley Cibber (1740)

Confessions of Alfred de Musset (1810-1857)

MEMOIRS

The Gospels (41-90)

Memoirs of Jacques de Casanova (1751)

Memoirs of Madame Roland (1754-1793)

My Prisons, by Silvio Pellico (1833)

Recollections of a Literary Life, by Alphonse Dau-
det

Auld Lang Syne, by Frederick Max Müller (1898)

DIARIES

The Diary and Correspondence of John Evelyn
(1640-1704)

The Journal of a Naturalist, by John James Audubon
(1780-1851)

Froissart's Chronicles

The Diary of Madame D'Arblay (1840)

BIOGRAPHY:

THE BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

- Heroes and Hero-Worship, by Thomas Carlyle
(1841)
Representative Men, by Ralph Waldo Emerson
(1850)
The Four Georges, by W. M. Thackeray (1860)
Autobiographical Memoir, by Harriet Martineau
(1877)

THE LITERARY PORTRAIT

- Imaginary Conversations, by Walter Savage Landor
(1824)
The English Humorists, by W. M. Thackeray
(1851)
The Child in the House, by Walter H. Pater (1894)

THE LITERATURE OF TRAVEL

- The Voyages of James Cook (1768-1779)
Travels in the Interior of Africa, by Mungo Park
(1799)
Recollections of a Tour Made in Scotland, by Dorothy Wordsworth (1803)

BIOGRAPHICAL POETRY

- The Journal to Stella, by Jonathan Swift (1710-
1713).

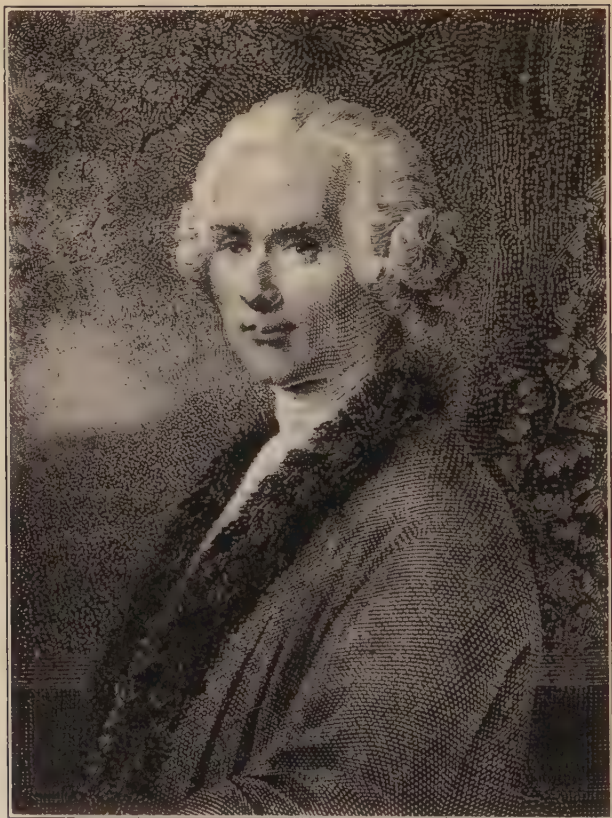
THE LITERATURE OF PERSONALITY

In Memoriam, by Alfred Tennyson (1850)

BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL FORM

Robert Browning: Personalia, by Edmund Gosse
(1890)

NIHIL NISI VERUM



JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU
"Such as I was, I have declared myself"

IV: NIHIL NISI VERUM

SOME OLD STANDARDS FOR NEW BIOGRAPHERS

THE promise of a reasonably indiscreet biography, with the suggestion that it is based on the subject's "secret memoirs" or that it is a corrected biographical impression, subtly emphasizing the insinuating word "real," makes our refined philosophies appear things far remote from life and living. But who can withstand the appeal of a biography that purports to bare the recesses of some richly experienced soul? Even the most austere among us are inclined to find under such circumstances some apology for mental *déshabillé*. Frankly, we want the details, and are impatient with any suggestion of suppression that might keep us from the most intimate relation possible of the life-story of an interesting personality. Surprised, possibly, at our own lack of disapproval of the extent to which our demands out-Rousseau Rousseau, we assure ourselves that our attitude is but the re-

flection of a legitimate interest in the intimate portrait.

But what the autobiographer may deem necessary in the matter of intimate revelations, and for which, through his candor, secure the credit of a very desirable sincerity, is still popularly regarded as a questionable standard of ethics for the objective biographer. Carlyle's "Reminiscences," for example, were received with rapture by his generation and were regarded as satisfactory; but when, as literary executor, Froude presented a more extensive picture in his "Thomas Carlyle," with additional details no more intimate than Carlyle himself saw fit to use, his efforts were met with a storm of abuse. Carlyle's friends felt that even if Froude had painted Carlyle as they themselves knew him to be, yet there were many things that should not have been said by one so close to Carlyle as Froude had been. However nice the ethical considerations in such a case may be, it should not be forgotten that the biographer is under an obligation to the public as well as to his subject. As to whose rights are the more sacred, in the matter of the material the biographer uses, must

be decided, not by the wishes of the family of the subject nor by a public content only with raw revelations, but by the overshadowing demands of a truthful presentation of the life and character of that subject; prejudices and preferences have no part in the proper performance of such a task.

This is a point of some importance to the biography orgy which we are at present indulging in, as much of our current output seems to be written largely on the sole principle of what is appealing to the public. In fact, it is no great compliment to those whose interests lie in this field to have assigned as the chief motives for their enthusiasm love of gossip and vulgar curiosity. It seems unfortunate that even properly interested readers are left quite ignorant of the fact that there are certain very definite principles to which all biography that is deserving of the name must conform. Looking at the office which Froude performed, for instance, from the standpoint of biographic art, I am confident that the literary executor was justified in accepting Dr. Johnson's view that a man should be judged by the *mass* of his character, rather than by dis-

connected details; and it was the whole, not the parts, that Froude was concerned with. And, surely, Carlyle could stand the whole truth, if any one could! No one probably realized better than Carlyle that geniuses are an irritable race; and that indigestion and lofty philosophy are not calculated to make one sociable and lovable, either in or out of the home. At any rate, the consensus of opinion is that Froude achieved in his life of the Sage one of the triumphs of biographic art. It needs only to be read from the viewpoint of the sum total of character rather than from isolated details.

Unpardonably grievous, however, are the biographical sins committed in the name of candor. The ultra-candid advocate of life-writing frequently mistakes the desire to produce something sensational as that of an exemplification of the true biographic spirit. While Rousseau achieved renown in parading without reserve his virtues and vices before a world that was not accustomed to such frankness, yet, despite the boastful emphasis he laid upon his candor, his story would have been just as genuine a contribution to confessional literature even if he had

been less insistent upon proving to the world that he could be utterly unsparing of himself in his presentation; other elements make his story a great biography; but, unfortunately, his imitators have kept their eyes too much on his faults and too often overlooked the really significant things in his famous undertaking. His merit consists in the fact that he presented the man as he was, not that he had the temerity to expose his weaknesses, follies, and vices. Evil, it is true, is usually mingled with the good in all strong personalities and deserves its fair place in the biographer's portraiture; but that fair place has this limitation, beyond which the biographer, whatever his relation might have been to his subject, dare not go: *Is this a true portrait of the man whose character I am aiming to present? Is the material I am considering of value in painting the picture in its true colors?*

In the use of biographical material the limits are definitely set by the function of the biographer: he is emphatically, as I have pointed out, a compiler and critic, and must under no circumstances conceive his office as that of a creator. Had Southey sufficiently realized this

fact, he would not have marred his otherwise well-balanced and satisfying "Life of Nelson" ⁵ by intruding his own moral views of life on his readers in what purports to be the story of Nelson's career. The persistent dwelling on the penumbra of Poe's life was, likewise, what made Griswold's biography of the poet a veritable literary crime. A portrait, I am well aware, cannot become a picture with the shadows left out; but if the shadows are made too prominent, the portrait is bound to be distorted. Mr. Hervey Allen has just recently shown in his "Israfel" how the life of a man like Poe should be treated; apparently the biographer's mind in this instance is wholly impartial, and he lets the contemporary documents speak for themselves without any preconceived theory of what he should find in the life of this much maligned poet. He, moreover, admirably reconstructs the period into which this tragic life was brought and shows the effect of that environment which was much to blame for most of the disasters that befell the strange genius. Mr. Allen must have given thoughtful consideration to William Roscoe Thayer's demand that, *in writing biog-*

raphy, we should tell the story as nearly as possible as the actor or hero underwent it.

The failure on the part of biographers to get a proper conception of their office has not only given us too many biographical myths, but accounts, in a large measure, for the ever-growing list of commonplace and bad biographies. There is little doubt that, to secure the right result, one can have no better motive than that which inspired the admirable Boswell: a desire to perpetuate for all time the life of a great figure as he walked among men, an enthusiasm for the truthful presentation of the admired character, and a respect for the qualities and achievements of the man of such a nature that the real concern in the biographer's mind is that men coming after may know the subject and estimate him with something of the fidelity to truth as that which evoked the writer's efforts. Not all subjects could measure up to the possibilities of such an inspiration; but it is doubtful whether any great objective biographies have ever been produced that were not the outcome of some such stimulus. Yet, the subject of a biography does not determine its commonplaceness. Carlyle

writes, in his "Life of Sterling" ¹⁰: "I have remarked that a true delineation of the smallest man, and his pilgrimage through life, is capable of interesting the greatest man." If every individual, as has frequently been asserted, has the material for at least one good story in his life, that material may be presented as effectively in the form of biography as in the shape of fiction. Sainte-Beuve's "Portraits" ⁸⁰ deal with people who made very little stir in the world, yet hosts of admirers still attest their approval of these as very genuine life-stories.

Whatever the part played in the eyes of the world the subject of a biography may have had, there are certain qualities that the biographer himself must possess, if anything like real success, as biography now goes, is to be hoped for. Among these, as of first-rate importance, are wise and well-regulated sympathy, interest, appreciation, and enthusiasm. But not for a moment must such characteristics degenerate into a tolerance for literary whitewashing. *De mortuis nihil nisi bonum* may once have been regarded as a fitting maxim for the biographer; but for any tolerable ideals the old Latin adage must

now read: *De mortuis nihil nisi verum*. A suspicion of bias, as indeed any evidence of an inclination to compromise unwisely, tends to undermine that confidence in the author which is essential in an undertaking so delicate as life-writing. However keen his sympathy with his subject may be, moreover, no true biographer will allow himself to make an idol of that subject, nor descend to the state of an apologist; extravagant eulogies and panegyrics have discounted the value of biography in every age, but we have at last reached the stage when we can show a proper interest and appreciation of the life and work of a subject without sacrificing all sense of proportion. Suetonius presented the Cæsars with the same freedom with which they lived; but, like the good biographer he was, he believed his duty was properly performed when he had depicted these ancient worthies as their contemporaries knew them. The spirit of enthusiasm is present in his work; but, best of all, it is an enthusiasm for the truth.

“Truth, naked, unblushing truth,” Gibbon declares to be the first essential in an autobiography. Interpreted as simple faithfulness of

record, it is the all-important test of the worth of self-biography. In this respect, there is more than a half-truth in the witticism that defines an autobiography as only what a "biography ought to be." But it should be understood that Gibbon's requirement involves the whole of the legal formula: "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." Hence, no playing up of one aspect of character to the neglect of others equally real can achieve the biographic ideal. Cellini's "Memoirs"⁴⁸ represent the author as guilty of almost every crime in the calendar; but while the picture presented is not a particularly creditable one from a moral point of view, the Italian artist had the keenness to appreciate the truth of what later became the French maxim that every good biographer adopts as his blue light in the matter of compromising with his subject and the susceptibilities of the subject's friend and relatives: "*Tout comprendre, c'est tout pardonner.*"

While occurrences that reveal weaknesses, foibles, indiscretions, and vices have a place in the composite picture that the biographer by virtue of his office is obligated to present, the real

purpose of biography is rather to show what is characteristic and habitual in the life of the subject. Incidents that indicate temperament, opinions, personal habits, oddities, and prejudices, to whatever extent they affect character, must be noted; but they are not ends in themselves and should be dwelt upon only in so far as they are distinctively characteristic. Overemphasis, however, of even the unique and personal will produce a distorted picture, perhaps quite unlike the real individual.

But suppression of biographical material is apt to be a delicate undertaking. Apart, however, from the manifestly trivial matter that any good biographer would omit, there are incidents and temporary mental attitudes that are not the outgrowth of character; such mere accidents have not only no place in the story of a life, but, when introduced, result merely in dimming the really important outlines. Still, no biographer has a right to allow personal prejudice or bias to control the admission or exclusion of material that may gain biography's legitimate end or to color the picture in other than its actual keeping. Seeing a life as a whole can alone

properly guide the biographer as to what must be included and what it is just as necessary to omit.

Enthusiasm for a subject may be a real asset in the biographer; but the spirit of extenuation, into which it is very likely to develop in any but tried hands, admits of no defense. The suggestion of ulterior motive is as bad as evidence of warped judgment. Biography as a debt to friendship is as unpardonable as biography as a means of settling old scores. But the other extreme from extenuation is just as vicious a viewpoint: we are told that the best of men are but men at best, and are at once led to a biographical clinic, in which "The True John Smith" is exhibited as the subject of most of the ills that can afflict human character. One may feel inclined, indeed, to find some excuse for a recent reviewer's statement that modern biography is concerned at present with debunking history's heroes and whitewashing its reprobates. There is, however, never any justification for obliqueness in the treatment of a life.

More banal than the tendency toward obliqueness in the writing of biography is the in-

excusable trait of malice, as evidenced, for extreme illustration, in the Duc de Saint-Simon's portrait of Louis XIV. Drawn with the most deliberate animosity, the barely concealed motive of the "Memoirs,"⁴⁹ it has been, since its publication, uniformly regarded as a flagrant violation of the ethical in biography-writing. A like spirit is manifest in Purcell's "Life of Cardinal Manning," written in as utter disregard for the truth as some of the recent sketches of prominent political characters both here and abroad. We can but recall *Othello's* injunction to *Lodovico* and *Montano*:

When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice.

Edwin Abbott's editing of Pope, for the same reason, has justly been characterized "a literary sin and blunder."

The modern biographer is inclined to sneer at the work of the professional hagiographer. The objection arises chiefly from the obliqueness alleged to be necessary, in order to present the character of the individual as justifying the

church's acceptance of the claims of saintship. Whatever your view of hagiology may be, it would be difficult to show, however, that there is any more objectionable compromising of material, any more reprehensible exclusion of matters of biographical import, or any greater effort to present the saint according to a preconceived notion, than can be shown to mark the method of treatment of some of our very pretentious and approved biographies. Subtitles, such as "Loving Service," do not convey the impression of perfect freedom from obliqueness of treatment. As the saint's life is written only after the claims of canonization have been thoroughly sifted, and the fitness of the individual has been established in accordance with accepted standards for saintship, if the keynote of the life is such as to entitle the person to canonization the hagiologist is but carrying out an accepted theory of biography-writing in presenting the life from the standpoint of its directing forces, rather than by playing up ephemeral interests, trivial anecdotes, and inconsequential activities. The account of the life of the saint, it is true, is likely to become an idealization, as the basis of

acceptance of saintship is the part the Christian ideal has played in the life of the one whose story is thus told. I hold no brief for the hagiographer, but I do object to the attitude of the general biographers who question this method, but who unhesitatingly use biographical material to suit their own ends rather than those of their subjects. Accepting only the facts that suit a preconceived theory, rather than allowing the facts to establish the theory, is not life-writing; it is more nearly a sort of biographical argumentation.

That a biographer should deliberately set himself to the task of defending his subject is an undertaking in itself wholly indefensible. Magnified epitaphs and extended biographical tracts have justly received the condemnation of all qualified critics as contradicting the rightful function of biography. Such are simply literary distortions and are as unfair to both subjects and the readers of biography as life-stories written for the purpose of illustrating a theory. We may, I believe, safely accept the injunction to be on our guard against the biographies of an advocate. Thus, Stowe's "Lady Byron Vindi-

cated," as a biography, is as inherently false as the family or official compilation purporting to be the complete story of an individual. The rightful purpose of biography can no more be effected by eulogy than by satire. Macaulay's essay on "The Life of Samuel Johnson" is as offensive from the points of prejudice and satire as Lady Shelley's biography of her husband is from the other extreme of bias and eulogy. Both biographers err in their conception of the rightful purpose of their undertakings. Notwithstanding La Rochefoucauld's assurance that "our enemies come nearer the truth in their judgment of us than we do in our judgment of ourselves," we are far from being persuaded that even the brilliancy and encyclopedic knowledge of a Macaulay can atone for the obliqueness with which he has treated his subject. Nor can we have much more patience with such a production as Hallam Tennyson's "Life of Alfred Tennyson"; ¹⁸ whatever may be said of it as a filial undertaking, it is obviously more of an idealization of the poet than it is a life of Tennyson the man. The son's reverence for his artist father misled him into erecting a monument to

the poet's art, instead of presenting as of fundamental interest the character and personality of the man.

That a calm, judicial view of the life of a near one is possible is evidenced in Max Müller's story of his father's life. We have no reason to believe that the son here has not given us a picture of his subject as true to life as a portrait painter could have given of his physical features. A similar success may be instanced in the biography that the poet Crabbe wrote of his father.

Boswell did not feel it necessary to make a saint of Dr. Johnson, nor Moore of Byron; they felt too strongly, perhaps, the assurance of Pliny: *Qui vitia odit, homines odit*. There is even a sane view that can be taken of Shakespeare's declaration that "the best of men are moulded out of faults." Froude's "Carlyle" is charged with being "the unkindest and most scornful book in English literature," but, with that, the author has a higher conception of the duties of a biographer than the deliberate literary whitewasher. Though brutal frankness has little in its favor, there is, nevertheless, a frank-

ness that does not carry with it an inclination to make prominent the weaknesses of a subject for sensational purposes; the attribute of frankness may be exhibited just as clearly in a constructive way as for the purpose of "debunking history." Of course, no man has a right to be judged by his strength alone; and it is indeed difficult to be charitable toward the view, expressed in the preface of a recent biography in these terms: "The writer of this memorial has not thought it necessary to call attention to defects in the character she has sought to portray."

Too many writers of biography, wanting in the true biographic sense, see their work as drama or epic, and, consequently, let laws other than those belonging to biography control their methods of development. The inclination is evident, moreover, to regard certain close relationships to the subject as entitling writers of biography to speak with the authority that involves effectiveness. But the mere access to material can never be looked upon in itself as a guarantee of an adequate life-story. Official position may constitute a vantage ground from the standpoint of advertising, but cannot give a warranty of

success in producing a work of art. Unfortunately, when such work is put before the public, poorly organized and useless for real biographic purposes as it so frequently results in being, it tends to drive better work from the field. But not even the most pompous pretensions can alone produce a work of genuine biographic art, any more than family relationship or positions of power and influence can suffice for any other sort of literary sense and aptitude.

Convinced that the human soul cannot be studied by any sort of cataloguing method, Laura Spencer Portor, in the "Haunted Lives" previously referred to, discards the usual biographic procedure for something that aims at a philosophy of the subject. Discussing the comparative value of the outer facts of a life, she says:

All these Time at last—the only lastingly considerable biographer—rejects and throws away. That which Time retains as precious and imperishable is rather some fine essence of the spirit, some essential personality built up and moulded by preferences, predilections, and prepossessions of a most highly spirit-

ual order. The loves, the desires, the dear delights of men; the returning dreams, the recurrent longings that will not be gainsaid; the dead and long-lost dreamings that revisit the glimpse of our moon—these are indeed the spirit of us, and our immortalities.

But the atmosphere of systematized and padded journalism which has gathered about so much of our recent memoir-writing blurs the vital and the trivial; the apparent obsession for salacious and appealing facts, undoubtedly the greatest blight under which life-writing now rests, gives only slight consideration to “that which Time retains as precious and imperishable.” The result is a confusion of standards, both ethical and artistic.

In the light of the “essential personality” view of biography, it is difficult to understand the long-lingering notion of the *abiographic* life. Self-biography recognizes no such idea as is finely evidenced, for example, in the “Journal”⁶⁹ of Eugénie de Guérin. That some lives, however, are difficult of presentation, according to the recognized methods of writing objective biography, is undeniable; but this is due, prob-

ably, not so much to the spiritual subtlety of the life or to the alleged limitations of language in depicting the fineness of some human characters, as to the right theory of the biographic art. Ellis, Yeats, Garnett, Story, Swinburne, Gilfillan, and more recently others, have successfully tried to present the life of William Blake; each in his turn has felt, as Carlyle did in the case of Burns, that all previous biographies had left something essential in the life of this mystic unsaid. The facts were there, but Blake was not. The problem in the life of Blake, however, does not lie, I am sure, in the handling of the outer events of his career, nor in formulating a mystic's creed; but rather in the harmonizing of a rare combination of mind, heart, and personal qualities into a full, rich, consistent whole. Such lives possess an ingredient of child-like vanity which the biographer needs to know how to handle to make his composite picture. Indeed, the biographer who is able to look at the world through the eyes of his subtle-minded subject can alone hope to succeed in presenting certain lives truly to others.

Many popular misconceptions of men of un-

usual genius are due more largely to inadequate biographical treatment than to unfavorable prejudice on the part of the biographer—and the inadequacy results, like as not, from misplaced emphasis. There seems little doubt, on the one hand, that prejudice, if not real malice, laid the foundation for many of the distorted views relating to the characters of such men as Sir Francis Bacon and Edgar Allan Poe; yet, on the other hand, while laying down a correct formula, Stoddard appears to have been unable to put into effect his requirements for a life of Shelley. His interpretation of Shelley's need, in his "Anecdote Biography of Percy B. Shelley," is, no doubt, a correct one, and the very thing that we find lacking in so many biographies, especially of men like Shelley, Burns, and Blake. "What requires the greatest skill," Stoddard assures us, "is the detection and interpretation of the spiritual facts of his life * * * the thorough understanding of his heart, his mind, his genius." But this skill is found so rarely that the number of wholly adequate biographies must ever be limited.

In the absence, however, of anything like a

well-formulated theory of either the ethical or art requirements of good biography, the reading public is justified in the impression that the standards for life-writing are, after all, only such criteria as the individual biographer may care to set up, and that he alone is concerned with the success or failure of his ideals. Yet, the usual round of discussion that recurs with inevitable certainty whenever the question arises as to the advisability, say, of publishing private correspondence suggests a groping after something like definite ethical standards. The advocates of the sanctity of letters, usually shifting their position on the principle of whose ox is gored, categorically state their opposition as follows: the public has no interest in the inner life of a celebrity, the demand being created by mercenary, sensation-loving biographers; and such material, even when pleasing, does not insure a judicial knowledge of character; and, furthermore, it is an unpardonable breach of social privacy. The unwise use of letters may indeed be capable of doing much harm, as was the case of the recent "Letters of Franklin K. Lane"; but the true biographer, being unbiased

and having no ulterior motive to serve, could not be led to err in so important a matter. If any of the arguments opposing the publication of letters, or in fact any other form of autobiographical remains, are sound, he would have no other alternative but to leave the material unpublished; but in assuming this responsibility he must be very sure where his duty lies. There can be only one legitimate purpose for biography of any kind: *to keep alive the man's individuality*. If such an aim is not the prime consideration of the biographer, there can certainly be no value in parading forth material for a mere moral scarecrow.

Emerging from the uncertainty and confusion of practices and ideals, however, the biographer's duty to both his subject and the reading public is, I believe, clear and unmistakable: *the world has a right to an honest, richly complete presentation of the character and achievements, personality, and temperament, and all that is implied in the essential personality of the subject, as true to life as human skill can make it*. The extent to which this ideal fails to be realized renders any work purporting to be biography to

that degree unsatisfactory. But even an honest purpose may be accomplished in such a clumsy fashion that the product defeats its own aim; so, the biographer must evidence in all the finer adjustments of the inner and the outer facts of the life of the subject not only a perfect knowledge and appreciation of the rules of the art side of his task, as approved by a consensus of opinion of those qualified to direct in this delicate matter, but must also manifest in every way "a manliness that will not let him lie." A sacred duty or a high privilege calls for the best that is within one; when, then, that duty or that privilege falls within the province of biography, the task must be performed with the thought in mind of the "invisible censor."

Grey are all theories
And green alone Life's golden tree.

A READING LIST

In addition to the biographies already listed as of special excellence, there remain a few that should be included as recommended readings; among these are some of the best in the whole range of biographical literature. As a whole,

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they represent approved ethical notions relating to this form of work; an occasional one, however, represents at least questionable procedure along the lines of ethics. Only the chronological order of their appearance is indicated here.

The Apology of Lorenzo de' Medici (1514-1548)
Journal of the Plague Year, by Daniel Defoe
(1722)

Biographia Literaria, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge
(1817)

Walden; or, Life in the Woods, by Henry D. Thoreau (1817-1862)

Herbert Spencer: an Autobiography (1820-1904)
Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1840)

The Life of Oliver Goldsmith, by Washington Irving (1845)

The Life of John Sterling, by Thomas Carlyle
(1851)

My Schools and My Schoolmasters; or, the Story of My Education, by Hugh Miller (1854)

Chatterton: a Story of the Year 1770, by David Masson (1874)

The Life of Christ, by Frederick W. Farrar (1874)

The Letters and Memorials of Jane Welsh Carlyle,
by Thomas Carlyle (1883)

THE LITERATURE OF PERSONALITY

Praeterita: Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts Perhaps Worthy of Memory in My Past Life, by John Ruskin (1885-1900)

The Life of Alexander Pope, by W. J. Courthope (1889)

Memories of Vailima, by Isobel Strong and Lloyd Osbourne (1903)

The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay, by George Otto Trevelyan (1876)

The Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, by Thomas Moore (1830)

THE BURIED LIFE OF LITERATURE



JOHAN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

His last utterance, "More Light," characterized his life

V: THE BURIED LIFE OF LITERATURE

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

WITH a fundamental biographical interest in pretty much all his literary undertakings, including even those of history, Carlyle very naturally introduces throughout his writings frequent observations along the lines of biography that have proved to be wise and helpful; much of his essay work, indeed, besides those specific discussions of history and biography in which a real philosophy is attempted, is essentially biographical criticism. In his later essay on "Jean Paul," for instance, he makes this statement:

It has been said that no Poet is equal to his Poem, which saying is partially true; but in a deeper sense, it may also be asserted, and with still greater truth, that no Poem is equal to its Poet. Now, it is Biography that first gives us both Poet and Poem; by the significance of the one elucidating and completing that of the other.

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And two years later, in his essay on "Biography," he gives the following echo of his earlier view:

Even in the highest works of Art, our interest, as the critics complain, is too apt to be strongly or even mainly of a Biographic sort. In the Art we can nowise forget the Artist: while looking on the *Transfiguration*, while studying the *Iliad*, we ever strive to figure to ourselves what spirit dwelt in Raphael; what a head was that of Homer, wherein, woven of Elysian light and Tartarean gloom, that old world fashioned itself together, of which these written Greek characters are but a feeble though perennial copy. The Painter and the Singer are present to us; we partially and for the time become the very Painter and the very Singer, while we enjoy the Picture and the Song. Perhaps too, let the critic say what he will, this is the highest enjoyment, the clearest recognition, we can have of these.

As an element, therefore, in the clearest interpretation of life and letters, biography holds a significant place. Most of the more sincere productions especially cherished by the authors themselves represent an effort to embody in ar-

tistic form an experience of exceptional meaning to them. The closeness of its theme to the life of the author, in the sense of being deeply felt, is the measure of its possible effect upon others. Not one of them can be entirely separated from the mind of its originator. To get a real appreciation of an experience, therefore, implies an understanding of it from the viewpoint of the one who undergoes it; this involves knowing the circumstances that brought the work into existence. Art appreciation, whatever other meanings may be attached to it, implies, fundamentally, an understanding of an art product from the viewpoint of its creator.

In the "Apologia pro Vita Sua"⁴⁵ of Cardinal Newman, for illustration, we have perhaps as careful a piece of analysis of one's course of action as would be needed to satisfy the most fastidious logician. In it we find the eminent churchman explaining step by step his course of thought and action that led him from the Church of England to the Church of Rome. Though admired as an exceptional specimen of nineteenth-century English, and regarded as of importance in the history of the Oxford Move-

ment, and even as deserving of attention simply as an exemplification of logic, yet the prime value of the "Apologia" must ever be the light it throws on the life and character of John Henry Newman. It could never be understood fully as an isolated bit of writing, but must derive its meaning from its relationship to the life-story of the author. We need to know what was behind it as well as what is in it, to give it anything like a proper appraisal.

But while the "Apology" is read by the few with due appreciation, at least of its high intellectual qualities, the same author's wonderfully beautiful and touching hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," composed just before he made his decision to leave the church in which he was reared, has penetrated, with its heart appeal, into the remotest corners of the earth, and has become the prayer of thousands who have not even heard of the "Apology." Yet, even in the case of a hymn the fullest appreciation cannot come from mere heart acceptance. Not even so, although, as is the case with "Lead, Kindly Light," it is associated with those deeply moving occasions when we are looking for the last

time upon the mortal remains of some loved one to whom, living, the hymn was a favorite. Faith and hope, it is true, rise high in our lives on such occasions; and it would seem that then, if ever, the realization of such a production should be completely ours. Under whatever circumstances the hymn may be used, however, its real significance in relation to the life of its author as a genuine prayer for guidance in a crucial moment furnishes us the key for the emotional and the intellectual evaluation that alone can be thought to do it justice.

How close this relationship of even an unpretentious production may be to the life of its author is well illustrated in a simple poem like Bryant's "To a Waterfowl." In this instance, as frequently happens, we find an actual experience, a minor life-crisis, crystallized in an abiding art form. The author speaks in one of his letters of "the very forlorn and desolate feeling one evening late in the year of 1816, as he journeyed on foot to see what inducement a near-by town offered him for the practice of law, in which he had but recently been licensed." His future, he declares, never seemed more

desperate to him and uncertain. But as he watched the dying day he noticed a solitary bird winging its way along the horizon. His eyes remained fixed on the gradually disappearing figure until it was lost in the distance. But it seemed all at once to give him renewed strength and courage. His fresh hope was shortly after revealed in his lines "To a Waterfowl," in the last stanza of which we find the expression of faith gathered from the scene before him on the evening of his deep despair:

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

The crises of life furnish us with many of the most dynamic literary records—those that represent the urge of genuine experience rather than the desire to hit upon an acceptable art form. Hence it is that so large a share of the world's best and most enduring literature is autobiographical in nature. Though usually constituting the sincerest productions of an author, they are not always regarded or labeled as "representa-

tive" or even "characteristic"; but they furnish us with a dependable cue for a definite standard of appreciation: *the biographical circumstances out of which they grew, involving always the intent of the author.*

Since any real criticism deserving of the name presupposes an intelligent appreciation, emphasis must be placed on a knowledge of the relationship of the art form to the life of the author as an indispensable condition for sound judgment; otherwise, the validity of purely impressionistic views must be admitted as sufficient, even where laws and principles are well formulated. Too frequently, however, even with supposedly well-trained readers, there is a marked tendency to read themselves into their literary preferences instead of making an effort to realize them, particularly in the case of biographies, as transcripts of other lives. Imaginatively realizing the circumstances of the production of a literary masterpiece is assuredly the necessary first step in appreciation, for we can certainly have little ground for the notion that we sympathize with, appreciate, or correctly measure the work until we have come into possession of

the production facts as fully as is possible. The neglect, on the part of the less imaginative, to cultivate this aspect of reading, accounts, no doubt, for the narrow acquaintance with great literature, even among people of fairly extensive formal education. They quite naturally turn to those types of reading that have those barriers removed that prevent their entrance into the more abundant life of great books.

There is, of course, little doubt that even the ordinary reader, although he may make only the mildest pretense to literary culture, gets something of the lyric fineness and simple beauty from the mere reading or hearing of such an exquisite creation as Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar"; but there is a vast difference between getting *something* from the reading of a literary masterpiece and getting *what was intended by the author*. No mere whim prompted the request of Tennyson that this, his last great lyric, be placed at the close of every edition of his works to be given to the public after his death. When the poem is read *as the poet laureate intended it should be*, as a sign of redemption from a meaningless philosophy, we

realize that it bears a far more significant relation to the life of its author than the casual reader would suspect. It is, indeed, the expression of a pure, unalloyed faith in the verities of the religion to which he could give for so much of his life only the agnostic's assent. As was the case with many of the great thinkers of his day, the religion offered to the poet involved so many dogmatic requirements that Tennyson could not give to it an honest expression of belief. He thought through his difficulties, however, as most of the great thinkers have been able to do; and at the close of his life he was able to put the seal of faith to his questionings, his fears, and his more positive doubts. As his final attitude, in the light of which a certain mental reservation must be had in the reading of some of his earlier work, we have his most popular lyric, "Crossing the Bar." The essential meaning of the poem becomes clear only through the knowledge of its relationship to what the author had previously thought and frequently expressed at other times; and this knowledge not only puts it on a higher plane of meaning, but alone does suitable justice to its author.

An acceptance of the notion that all definition as well as classification of literature can best be given in terms of life implies that any method of interpretation that fails to make use of the notion that literature yields its full richness only when it is understood in its relation to life must be to some degree incomplete. Such an interpretation, furthermore, if it overlooks the connection of the masterpiece with the life of the individual producer, omits, I believe, a very real point in the possible estimation of largest and truest significance. We may read "The Sandpiper" of Celia Thaxter and get from it, possibly, a dim impression of loneliness; but the reading of the poem alone will never enable us to realize the solitariness that was the little child's actual lot in life, a loneliness that made an impression that lasted for a lifetime: we need to know that the poem is not a figment of the imagination but a genuine picture, recalled out of the life of the author, to get the real impression of this biographical panel. So, too, the exquisite "Sensitive Plant," with its actual meaning beclouded by delicate phrasing and imagery, can make its right appeal only as a bit of self-

analysis of its author, who thus symbolized the result of a searching examination of his own spiritual being. It is not necessary for us to agree with Shelley in his findings, but it is absolutely essential that we know what he was trying to do, before we pass judgment on his effort.

The importance of taking into consideration the biographical background of a masterpiece is obvious when the circumstances out of which a work grows involve practically the whole life of the author. Such is virtually the case with George Eliot's rare lyric, "Oh, May I Join the Choir Invisible." The writer of these lines—though essentially religious natured as she was—like Tennyson, found it impossible to accept any of the commonly received religious beliefs of her contemporaries, at least in their insistent, formalized statements. Still, "the choir invisible" haunted her dreams; she did not believe it was what those about her so confidently asserted it to be; yet, "something" there must be. Finally, a compensation creed came to her relief, vaguely expressive of a deep longing, which she states in those lines beginning:

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Oh, may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence . . .
Whose music is the gladness of the world.

Only a knowledge of the character of George Eliot and of her relation to the philosophies of her day can put one in a position to realize the full significance of this sincere autobiographical expression; the requirement here for a real appreciation is undoubtedly an acquaintance with the author's spiritual attitude toward life, as the poem represents much more than a mere mood.

Among the works of many great authors, too, there is usually at least one production that has the special association of a memorial of some sad, if not tragic, period in the life of its producer. The work may have all the literary finish and interest of "The Confessions of an English Opium Eater" ⁴²; the weird atmosphere of the magnificent "Manfred," picturing a being tortured by some ever-present and soul-racking memory that draws forth the Promethean spark of rebellion rather than penitence; the melancholy of "The Deserted Village," whose

memories still cling amidst the crueler days of success and achievement; or a less obviously tragic "Journal to Stella"⁹⁴; yet in each there is the inevitable biographical element, the lack of a knowledge of which makes them only dim echoes of a rich possibility of music. If, moreover, we know the stories of the lives behind the delightful "Sonnets from the Portuguese,"⁹⁶ as a random example, these poems are easily realized in our own lives; otherwise, this, like many another production of great potential enjoyment, misses for us the important point of becoming individualized.

"The Cotter's Saturday Night" was built around a sentiment of Burns's that there is something peculiarly venerable in the phrase "Let us worship God," as used by a decent, sober head of a family, introducing family worship. We have in this notion of the poet a concrete example of the tenderness of the man that is no less remarkable than his humor. As coming, therefore, out of the life of Burns, the poem means even more than a picture of life as he saw it. Burns, in fact, is on the whole a striking example of the added value of a bio-

BIOGRAPHY:

graphic background for the full appreciation of his work; the events of his life and the expression his poetic genius found are too closely connected for entirely separate consideration; and many of the best moments of his life, indeed, are crystallized in his poetry. To give the circumstances of the production of his poems, chronologically arranged, would present, in reality, no meager story of his life.

Some of our earlier experiences with the formal study of literary masterpieces, such as the inevitable selections from Milton, for instance, might have gathered saner associations and fewer antagonisms if something more tangible than style and rhythmic effects had been included in the teaching objectives. Who, indeed, does not recall the travesty on literature teaching in the all-too-common method by which "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" were presented in his school days? Analyzed and re-analyzed from every possible standpoint, every classical allusion run down, and each word-picture dwelt upon in dissecting-hall method, they were "studied" from all angles but the one

which could vivify them. As any high-school child knows, their essential meaning is derived from the relation which they bore to the life of Milton at that period when he was seriously considering his vocation in life. And while they were given to the world as highly finished literary products from that period of quiet study after he had left college, in their essence they picture a struggle on the part of the author to determine his career as a man of letters. Looking at nature, man, and art, first through the eyes of the man of joy and then through the eyes of a man of seriousness, was the method of contrasting the two avenues of life open to him. But while the events of his life marked out his career in the character of "Il Penseroso" and robbed him for all time of the delicate fancy and feeling evidenced at the period of the composition of these companion poems; yet, with a knowledge of his life and its environment we know the character of "L'Allegro" is latent there, though it never again came to be a manifest trait of his writings. The closeness of these poems to the inner life of the author furnishes

the key to their full appreciation, and they can be read aright only in their relationship to that life.

In the material that biography offers, then, is to be found not only an effective approach to the understanding of art products from the creative point of view, but the only dependable cue to their intent and purpose. A masterpiece of art may mean much, even when the artist is unknown; but how infinitely more human and significant it becomes when the special circumstances of its origin come to light is evidenced by the eagerness with which the production facts are seized upon by both the novice and the expert at art appreciation. Who the originals in the famous Sistine Madonna were and what the artist's relation to them was are not matters of merely incidental interest, but throw a significant light upon the artist's ideals and methods. They thus furnish an objective standard for the measurement of certain qualities of mind in the artist which he cannot separate from his work. To neglect to make use of the biographical relationships in the interpretation of a masterpiece, moreover, is to lay a foundation for that

obliqueness of opinion which constitutes the chief curse of modern critical methods. Conflicting interpretations of a literary masterpiece, for instance, arise for the most part from not knowing what the artist intended. But who can say with certainty what he intended other than himself? Biographical background, it would seem, would be the safest point of departure.

"The Buried Life" of literature, though it evokes our curiosity, too often evades the superficial search given to it. The great works of any art have richness of meaning usually in the degree in which they reflect the profound soul-experiences of their creators; yet they must in this most important respect remain closed books to us, unless we come into common possession of the circumstances and conditions that brought the works into being. The life incarnate in books can be revived for us, but only through a *realization of the one thing* the author has put into his masterpiece; and that realization can come only through a knowledge of the facts and conditions in the life of the author that form the background of his work. Otherwise, reading

BIOGRAPHY:

is likely to be done in terms of art rather than of life.

A READING LIST

Little additional reading is necessary, perhaps, to bring out the fact that there is quite a close relationship between much of the best in literature and the lives from which these productions sprang. The Burnses, Wordsworths, and Byrons, in poetry, as well as the Brontës, George Eliots, and Dickenss, in fiction, put largely their own stories in their works. If it is desired to ascertain something further, however, as to the extent to which a definite biographical background is present in literature, the following list of works, at least at one time popular, will possibly suffice:

The Lyrical Ballads, by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

Snowbound, by J. G. Whittier.

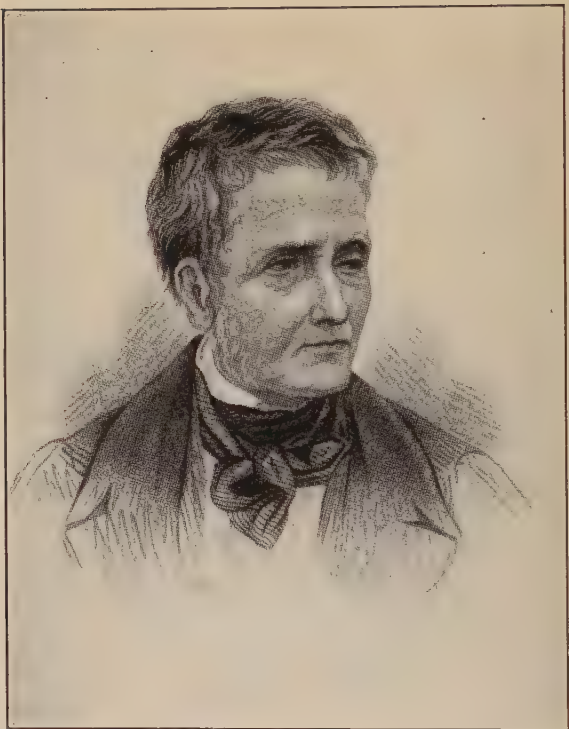
Rasselas, Samuel Johnson

David Copperfield, by Dickens.

Jane Eyre, by Charlotte Brontë.

Scenes from a Clerical Life, by George Eliot.

APPENDIX



THOMAS DE QUINCEY

§ 1

ONE HUNDRED REPRESENTATIVE BIO- GRAPHICAL WORKS

FOR the purpose of illustrating the character and range of biography I dare to be so bold as to list here the original or most usual titles of what I believe to be the "One Hundred Best Biographies." I would have it understood, however, that such a list must include some representation of every distinct aspect of life-writing; and some phases of the subject have fewer outstanding works in them than others. But for purposes of illustrating the varied notions of life-writing, both ethical and technical, the list, I believe, is sufficiently comprehensive and reliable. There is, indeed, scarcely a problem of method or material that has not at least one solution offered in the group.

The separate works in the list are grouped in the order in which they are, in the main, considered under "The Forms of Biography" in a preceding section. Though the titles and the contents are sometimes conflicting, they would

be grouped fairly accurately under the following sub-heads: Biography of an objective type, (numbers 1-18), Autobiography (numbers 19-30), Letters (numbers 31-36), Confessions (numbers 37-45), Memoirs and Diaries (46-71), Biographical Essays (72-77), Portraits (numbers 78-85), Travels (86-93), Biographical Poetry (numbers 94-97), Minor Forms of Biography (numbers 98-100).

1. LIVES OF ILLUSTRIOUS MEN (*Bioi Paralleloi*), by Plutarch (46?-120?)
2. THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF AGRICOLA (*De Vita et Moribus Julii Agricolae*), by C. Cornelius Tacitus (97)
3. THE LIVES OF THE POETS, by Samuel Johnson (1779-1781)
4. THE LIFE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D., by James Boswell, Esq. (1791)
5. THE LIFE OF NELSON, by Robert Southey (1813)
6. THE LETTERS AND JOURNALS OF LORD BYRON: NARRATED WITH NOTICES OF HIS LIFE, by Thomas Moore (1835)
7. MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE OF SIR WALTER

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- SCOTT, BARONET, by John Gibson Lockhart
(1837-1839)
8. THE LIFE AND CORRESPONDENCE OF THOMAS
ARNOLD, by Arthur P. Stanley (1844)
9. THE LETTERS AND SPEECHES OF OLIVER
CROMWELL, by Thomas Carlyle (1845)
10. THE LIFE OF JOHN STERLING, by Thomas
Carlyle (1851)
11. THE LIFE OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH, by Wash-
ington Irving (1845)
12. THE LIFE OF JOHN MILTON, NARRATED IN
CONNECTION WITH THE POLITICAL, EC-
CLESIASTICAL, AND LITERARY HISTORY
OF HIS TIME, by David Masson (1859-
1880)
13. CHATTERTON: A STORY OF THE YEAR 1770,
by David Masson (1874)
14. THE LIFE OF CHRIST, by Frederick William
Farrar (1874)
15. THE STORY OF GOETHE'S LIFE, by George
Henry Lewes (1872)
16. THE LIFE AND LETTERS OF LORD MACAU-
LAY, by George Otto Trevelyan (1876)
17. THE LIFE OF ALEXANDER POPE, by W. J.
Courthope (1889)
18. ALFRED LORD TENNYSON: A MEMOIR BY HIS
SON, by Hallam Tennyson (1897)

BIOGRAPHY:

19. THE BOOK OF MY OWN LIFE (*De Vita Propria Liber*), by Jerome Cardan (1501-1576)
20. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF HERBERT OF CHERBURY, LORD EDWARD (1583-1648)
21. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1706-1790)
22. MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF EDWARD GIBBON (1737-1794)
23. TRUTH FROM MY OWN LIFE (*Wahrheit aus meinem Leben*), by Jean Paul Frederick Richter (1763-1823)
24. THE HISTORY OF MY LIFE (*Histoire de ma vie*), by George Sand (1804-1876)
25. THE STORY OF MY LIFE (*Das Märchen meines Lebens*), by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875)
26. HERBERT SPENCER: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY (1820-1904)
27. MY SCHOOLS AND MY SCHOOLMASTERS; OR, THE STORY OF MY EDUCATION, by Hugh Miller (1854)
28. GEORGE ELIOT'S LIFE, AS RELATED IN HER LETTERS AND JOURNALS, arranged and edited by her husband, J. W. Cross (1885)
29. THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JOHN STUART MILL (1873)

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30. THE EDUCATION OF HENRY ADAMS, by Henry Adams
31. THE PASTON LETTERS, by members of the Paston family, of the County of Norfolk, England (1422-1509)
32. LETTERS OF MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ (1626-1696)
33. LETTERS FROM THE RIGHT HONORABLE LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU (1709-1762)
34. LETTERS OF JUNIUS (1769-1772)
35. LETTERS TO HIS SON, by Lord Chesterfield (Philip Dormer Stanhope) (1774)
36. THE LOVE LETTERS OF ROBERT BROWNING AND ELIZABETH BARRETT BARRETT (1889)
37. CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE (Aurelius Augustinus) (354-430)
38. THE NEW LIFE (La Vita Nuova), by Dante (1307)
39. THE APOLOGY OF LORENZO DE' MEDICI (L'Apologia di) (1514-1548)
40. CONFESSIONS OF JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU (Les Confessions) (1712-1778)
41. APOLOGY FOR THE LIFE OF MR. COLLEY CIBBER, by Colley Cibber (1740)
42. CONFESSIONS OF AN ENGLISH OPIUM EATER, by Thomas De Quincey (1822)

43. CONFESSIONS OF ALFRED DE MUSSET (Confession d'un Enfant de Siècle) (1810-1857)
44. CONFESSIONS OF AN INQUIRING SPIRIT, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1840)
45. APOLOGIA PRO VITA SUA, by John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890)
46. MEMORABILIA, by Xenophon (B.C. 430-357)
47. THE GOSPELS (41-90)
48. MEMOIRS OF BENVENUTO CELLINI (Vita di, Scritta da Lui Medesimo) (1500-1571)
49. MEMOIRS OF THE REIGN OF LOUIS XIV, by the Duc de Saint-Simon (1675-1755)
50. MEMOIRS OF JACQUES DE CASANOVA (1751)
51. MEMOIRS OF MADAME ROLAND (Vie Privée, Escrite par elle-même, Comtesse de M. J. Phlipon Roland (1754-1793)
52. POETRY AND TRUTH FROM MY LIFE (Aus meinem Leben, Dichtung und Wahrheit), by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1811)
53. MY PRISONS (Mei Prigioni), by Silvio Pellico (1833)
54. MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTË, by E. C. Gaskell (1857)
55. THE GREVILLE MEMOIRS: A JOURNAL OF THE REIGN OF KING GEORGE IV AND KING WILLIAM IV, by Charles C. F. Greville (1857)

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56. LETTERS AND MEMORIALS OF JANE WELSH CARLYLE, prepared for publication by Thomas Carlyle and edited by J. A. Froude (1883)
57. RECOLLECTIONS OF A LITERARY LIFE, by Alphonse Daudet
58. PRAETERITA: OUTLINES OF SCENES AND THOUGHTS PERHAPS WORTHY IN MY PAST LIFE, by John Ruskin (1885-1900)
59. MEMORIES OF VAILIMA, by Isobel Strong and Lloyd Osbourne (1903)
60. AULD LANG SYNE, by Frederick Max Müller (1898)
61. COMMENTARIES (Commentarii de Bello Gallico), by Caius Julius Cæsar (B.C. 58-52)
62. THE DIARY AND CORRESPONDENCE of John Evelyn (1640-1704)
63. THE DIARY of Samuel Pepys (1659-1669)
64. BIOGRAPHIA LITERARIA, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1817)
65. WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS, by Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)
66. JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR, by Daniel Defoe (1722)
67. THE JOURNAL OF A NATURALIST, by John James Audubon (1780-1851)

BIOGRAPHY:

68. CHRONICLES OF ENGLAND, FRANCE, AND SPAIN, AND ADJOINING COUNTRIES, FROM THE LATTER PART OF THE REIGN OF EDWARD II TO THE CORONATION OF HENRY IV, by Sir John Froissart
69. THE JOURNAL of Eugénie de Guérin (1848)
70. THE DIARY of Madame D'Arblay (Fanny Burney) (1752-1840)
71. THE JOURNAL INTIME, by Henri-Frédéric Amiel (1882)
72. ESSAY ON MILTON, by Thomas B. Macaulay (1825)
73. ESSAY ON BURNS, by Thomas Carlyle (1828)
74. ON HEROES, HERO-WORSHIP, AND THE HEROIC IN HISTORY, by Thomas Carlyle (1841)
75. REPRESENTATIVE MEN, by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1850)
76. THE FOUR GEORGES: SKETCHES OF MANNERS, MORALS, COURT, AND TOWN LIFE, by William M. Thackeray (1860)
77. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR, by Harriet Martineau (1877)
78. IMAGINARY CONVERSATIONS, by Walter Savage Landor (1824)
79. THE ENGLISH HUMORISTS OF THE EIGH-

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TEENTH CENTURY, by William M. Thackeray (1851)

80. PORTRAITS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, by Sainte-Beuve (1857-1862). This is an English translation of selections from Sainte-Beuve
81. IMAGINARY PORTRAITS, by Walter H. Pater (1887)
82. MEMORIES AND PORTRAITS, by Robert Louis Stevenson (1887)
83. CÆSAR: A SKETCH, by James Anthony Froude (1879)
84. THE CHILD IN THE HOUSE, by Walter H. Pater (1894)
85. MARGARET OGILVY, by her son, J. M. Barrie (1896)
86. TRAVELS of Marco Polo (1254-1324)
87. THE VOYAGES AND TRAVELS of Sir John Mandeville (1356)
88. VOYAGES of James Cook (1768-1779)
89. THE SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY, by Laurence Sterne (1768)
90. TRAVELS IN THE INTERIOR OF AFRICA, by Mungo Park (1799)
91. DIE HARZREISE, by Heinrich Heine (1779-1856)

BIOGRAPHY:

92. RECOLLECTIONS OF A TOUR MADE IN SCOTLAND, by Dorothy Wordsworth (1803)
93. THE SKETCH BOOK, by Washington Irving (1819)
94. JOURNAL TO STELLA, by Jonathan Swift (1710-1713)
95. IN MEMORIAM, by Alfred Tennyson (1850)
96. SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE, by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1850)
97. THE PRELUDE; OR, GROWTH OF A POET'S MIND: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL POEM, by William Wordsworth (1850)
98. MEDITATIONS, by Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121-180)
99. ANECDOTES OF THE LATE SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D., by Hester Lynch Piozzi (1709-1781)
100. ROBERT BROWNING: PERSONALIA, by Edmund Gosse (1890)

§ 2

DE QUINCEY AS A BIOGRAPHER

THOUGH Thomas De Quincey's mind took a wide range, yet, if we may judge by his voluminous contributions to the field of biography, his interests lay primarily in life-writing. The amount and value of his works in various phases of biography justify something more definite for him than such a classification as merely that of "essayist"; I believe rather that the character of such a considerable share of his writings warrants making the point that De Quincey, like Carlyle, Stephen and a number of others, should be regarded as primarily a biographer. The list of his works, chronologically arranged, shows a contribution to biographical literature, indeed, at the rate of almost two a year from the date of the publication of his "Confessions" to the close of his life. His contributions to the field of biography, arranged in the order of their composition, follow:

BIOGRAPHY:

- Aetat.* 36—Confessions of an English Opium Eater
(first edition)
John Paul Frederick Richter
- 38—Letters to a Young Man Whose Education Has Been Neglected
Anecdotage: Miss Hawkin's Anecdotes
Herder
- 39—Goethe as Reflected in His Novel of
"Wilhelm Meister"
- 42—Lessing
The Last Days of Immanuel Kant
- 44—Professor Wilson (first paper)
- 45—Richard Bentley (first two parts)
- 46—Samuel Parr, or Whiggism in Its Relations to Literature
- 47—Charlemagne
The Cæsars (introduction, Julius Cæsar, and Augustus)
- 48—The Cæsars, continued (Caligula, Nero, and Others)
Recollections of Hannah More
- 49—Sketches of Men and Manners, from the Autobiography of an English Opium Eater (included in his Autobiography)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (Literary and Lake Reminiscences)

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- 50—Samuel Taylor Coleridge (concluding article)
Autobiographic Sketches, continued
- 51—Autobiographic Sketches, continued
- 52—Sir Humphry Davy; Mr. Godwin; Mrs. Grant of Laggan
Life of Goethe
Life of Pope
- 53—Recollections of Charles Lamb
My Brother Pink (Autobiography)
Life of Schiller
Life of Shakespeare
Life of Milton
- 54—William Wordsworth (Literary and Lake Reminiscences)
Wordsworth and Southey (Literary and Lake Reminiscences)
Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge (Literary and Lake Reminiscences)
Early Memorials of Grasmere
On Milton
- 55—Society of the Lakes: Literary and Lake Reminiscences
London Reminiscences
- 57—Cicero
- 60—Coleridge and Opium Eating

BIOGRAPHY:

Notes on Gilfillan's Gallery of Literary
Portraits

61—Notes on Gilfillan's Gallery of Literary
Portraits

The Marquess Wellesley

62—Notes on Walter Savage Landor
Milton vs. Southey and Landor
Joan of Arc

63—Oliver Goldsmith
Charles Lamb

65—Professor Wilson
Memorial Chronology (Letters to a
Lady)

66—A Sketch of Childhood (Autobiography)

67—Sir William Hamilton
A Sketch from Childhood (Autobiogra-
phy)

68—Judas Iscariot

69—Autobiography, concluded

§ 3

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF AVAILABLE WORKS ON BIOGRAPHY

An Essay on the Composition of Biography, by James
F. Stanfield (1813)

Biography, an essay by Thomas Carlyle (1832)

W. Alexander: Lord Stirling (1726-1783), an Es-
say in Biography, by L. Schumacker (1897)

"Biography," in Essays and Addresses (pages 427-
453), by Phillips Brooks

Literary Interpretation of Life, by W. H. Crawshaw
(1900)

"Autobiography," in Hours in a Library, Vol. III
(pp. 220-251), by Leslie Stephen

Die moderne Selbstbiographie als historische Quelle,
by Hans Glagau (1903)

Geschichte der Autobiographie, by Georg Misch
(1907)

The Autobiography: A Critical and Comparative
Study, by Anna Robeson Burr (1909)

Principles of Biography, by Sir Sidney Lee (1911)

English Biography, by Waldo H. Dunn (1916)

The Art of Biography, by William Roscoe Thayer
(1920)

BIOGRAPHY:

"From Plutarch to Strachey," in *The Yale Review*
of October, 1921, by W. L. Cross

"The Art of Biography," in *The Saturday Review*
of Literature, Vol. I, No. 43, by Gamaliel
Bradford

"Blessed Be Biography," in *The Ladies' Home Jour-*
nal of April, 1924, by Harry Emerson Fosdick

§ 4

A GLOSSARY OF TITLES APPLIED TO BIOGRAPHY

ADVENTURES—

A partial or complete account of the stirring incidents and remarkable occurrences of a life, presented usually as experiences of the writer.

ANECDOTES—

Pointed and vivacious biographical incidents or fragments characteristic of an individual; detached facts, frequently of a private nature, of interest primarily from the light shed on the personality of the subject.

APOLOGY—

A defense of one's course of action; especially an attempted justification of a view or attitude that may appear to others as wrong.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR—

A familiar account of one's own life, without special pretension to exact method or completeness, written as the events are remembered by the writer.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY—

A biography written by the subject of it; also, a

BIOGRAPHY:

general term for all self-biography, and at times a specific term for a simple life-story of a subjective character, recording the outstanding events of the author's life.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE—

A brief statement of the significant facts of a life, following usually the chronological order; does not attempt to characterize the subject, and is usually sparing of critical comment.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH—

Includes such material as is intended to give a general idea of the subject, but, owing to its brevity, does not attempt to give a complete picture.

BIOGRAPHY—

The general term for all life-writing, but at times has the specific meaning of a form of purely objective life-story; the story of a life, with or without all that the word may now imply; frequently antithetical to autobiography as a general term.

CARICATURE—

A description which deliberately exaggerates that which is characteristic to the extent of making them appear ridiculous.

CELEBRATED LOVERS—

A type of group biography which gives partial treatment to persons having some great interest in

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common; only the material that makes the grouping logical is ordinarily introduced into the stories.

CHARACTER SKETCH—

An account of the life of a person for the purpose of bringing out the essential character; closely allied to the portrait idea; outer events are used only in so far as they shed light on character and personality.

CHRONICLES—

An accurate report of matters of fact relating to the life of an individual or to the lives of a group of individuals; constitutes only source material for biography.

COMMENTARY—

An account of the transactions and events of an individual's career, mostly of an external nature, with comments and explanations.

CONFESSION—

A form of self-biography in which an intimate account of the secret springs of an individual's history is presented; the spiritual element is dominant.

CONVERSATIONS—

A record of oral interchange of sentiments and observations, intended to depict one or another aspect of character.

BIOGRAPHY:

DIARY—

A somewhat less generalized form of the memoir, in which a daily record of events and transactions is set forth; not always to be distinguished from the journal.

EPITAPH—

Literally, a sepulchral inscription; but more generally a brief writing in memory or commendation of a distinguished character to be inscribed on a monument, commemorating a notable trait or achievement.

ESSAY, BIOGRAPHICAL—

A form of biography in which the life of an individual is looked at from a definite viewpoint; a partial treatment of a life, in which a neglected phase is brought to light, or a particular aspect is emphasized.

GOSPEL—

One of the four accounts of the earthly life of Christ, written from a special point of view; representative of perhaps a much larger number current in the first centuries of our era.

HISTORICAL MEMOIRS—

An account of events of a public nature, somewhat akin to the general notion of chronicles and annals, in which a certain biographical element is

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permitted to enter; leaning to the historical side of the memoir.

HISTORY OF A LIFE, THE—

A biography in which the story element is prominent; a biographical narrative of the event type; the story of a life, either objective or subjective, with little limitation as to characterization.

JOURNAL—

An account of daily transactions and events in the life of the subject, usually more discursive than in the typical diary; at times not to be distinguished from the diary; a self-record of a very intimate nature, frequently not intended for publication; a form of autobiography in which the daily thoughts, events, and achievements are recorded in such a manner as to present an accurate portrait.

JOURNEYS—

A species of travel literature, giving a more or less minute account of a prolonged trip, but usually in different parts of the same country.

LAMPOON—

An abusive and usually malicious censure written for the purpose of reproach.

LETTERS—

An easy, natural communication dealing with the interests held in common by the writer and the

BIOGRAPHY:

person addressed; a form of autobiography which, in collections, may become an unpremeditated revelation of character.

LIBEL—

A malicious publication tending to expose another to public ridicule; any defamatory writing relating to the life of another.

LIFE—

A history of the characteristic achievements and events of a person's life: commonly used as equivalent to the terms used for *a biography*; a very general term for any sort of account of the life of a person, as either an objective or a subjective story.

LIFE AND CHARACTER—

The story of a life in which the character element is emphasized; a term that explains the objective of all biography, in that characterization is at least a prominent feature.

LIFE AND CORRESPONDENCE—

The story of a life, in which letters written and received by the subject are introduced for illustrative purposes; an objective-subjective type of biography, using correspondence to aid in picturing the subject.

LIFE IN THE LETTERS—

. A life-story written from the material furnished by the subject's letters.

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LIFE AND OPINIONS—

An account of a life with special emphasis on the views and opinions held by the subject.

LIFE AND TIMES—

The history of an individual, with special attention to the relation he held to the people and institutions about him; the story of a life against a more or less minutely painted background.

LITERARY EXCURSIONS—

Informal accounts of people of general interest, with little effort at completeness either of characterization or detail.

LITERARY SILHOUETTES—

A form of literary portraiture, in which only the outlines of character are presented.

LIVES—

Collective treatment of the life-story of people of common interests; usually brief biographies of individuals of a special calling, as painters, poets, saints, or soldiers.

MEDITATIONS—

A sort of intellectual history of a person, in which his reflections on various matters are recorded; a mental or spiritual portrait.

MEMOIR—

A record of facts relating to an individual's life personally known to the writer; a biography writ-

BIOGRAPHY:

ten frequently without special regard to method and completeness.

MÉMOIRES—

The French form of our English term “memoirs,” sometimes retained in referring to the titles of these autobiographic forms originally appearing in the French language.

MEMOIRS—

A form of self-biography, composed from personal experience, and usually written in a rather familiar style; the choice of title when the writer himself records his recollections of the past.

MEMORIALS—

A record of life-facts that ought not to be forgotten.

MEMORIES—

Biographical facts which sentiment has gathered; a record of such events as have a close relation to the life of the narrator.

OBITUARIES—

A notice of the death of a person, usually accompanied by a short biographical sketch; frequently called an obituary notice.

OUTLINES—

A sketch showing the principal events and characteristics of a life.

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PERSONAL MEMOIRS—

A form of the memoir which emphasizes the writer's personal knowledge of the material which he introduces into the account of a life.

PERSONALIA—

Biographical addenda, usually not included in the official biography, consisting of letters, anecdotes, literary fragments, and other bits of information relating to the subject's life.

PERSONALS—

Brief announcements, usually of paragraph length, relating to the activity of a person or persons.

PILGRIMAGE—

A species of travel literature, implying a long journey, usually to some historic place.

PORTRAIT—

A graphic description or delineation of a person, making use of such details as will picture faithfully the essential character and personality of the subject.

RAMBLES—

An account of short excursions to persons and places of interest, reflecting particularly the taste and temperament of the writer.

RECOLLECTIONS—

A species of memoir, in which even the faint

BIOGRAPHY:

images of things long unthought of are recalled; a popular English term for memoirs, not ordinarily to be distinguished from the more popular French term.

RECORDS—

A faithful presentation of biographical data, with the emphasis on achievements.

REMEMBRANCES—

Things pertaining to a life-story that are deliberately recalled, though for a time they had passed from the memory of men.

REMINISCENCES—

A narration of incidents and events within the range of personal knowledge and experience, but leaning toward purely intellectual ideas; not too often distinguished from recollections and other very nearly equivalent terms.

REPRESENTATIVE MEN—

A type of biography, showing many modifications of title, in which the stories of the lives are presented from one or another of many angles, according to the specific purpose of a series of life-stories.

RETROSPECT—

A sort of life-story in which the events and achievements are consciously viewed from a later period of the writer's career.

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REVIEW—

An examination of the incidents and characteristics of a life for the purpose of accurate appraisal.

SKETCH—

A brief biographical form containing the chief features of a life, but usually of slight construction; a story that may contain more particulars than is found in the "outline," but one that is obligated to give only the leading aspects of the subject's life.

STORY OF A LIFE, THE—

A biography commonly of the event type; a complete account of the life and character of an individual; a variant title for other biographical terms, both subjective and objective.

STUDY OF A LIFE, THE—

A biography of a critical type, in which the character and achievements are carefully estimated; an examination of the subject's life from some particular angle.

SURVEY—

A comprehensive view of a life for the purpose of examining it in all its bearings; frequently only a variant term for "retrospect" or "review."

TABLE-TALK—

A collection of informal and familiar conversations, evidencing intellectual characteristics.

BIOGRAPHY:

THOUGHTS—

Choice observations and opinions on various topics; meditations on a special topic; views evidencing a significant attitude and reflecting character.

TITLES—NON-COMMITTAL—

Biographical titles that do not indicate the particular angle from which the material is handled.

TOUR—

An account of a rather rambling trip of considerable extent; an aspect of travel literature.

VIGNETTE—

A lightly drawn biographical portrait having more or less background; customarily used in the plural.

VITA—

The Latin for "life"; not to be distinguished from the usage of its translated English equivalent; found in all the great literatures of the world.

VOYAGE—

An account of a trip made by water from one place, port, or country to another; frequently used in the plural.

BIOGRAPHICAL FICTION—

A story that makes use of the biographical facts

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of actual people, but which usually interprets facts rather freely and arranges them to suit the purposes of the novel.

EULOGY—

A laudatory account of a person's life or character.

IMPRESSION—

Occasionally used in biography to denote the effect of the character and acts of a subject on the mind of the writer; a term emphasizing a point of view as purely a personal estimate of the biographer.

NOVELIZED BIOGRAPHY—

A story of a life told, in the main, in accordance with the facts of the lives of the characters, but for purposes of fiction; *cf.* BIOGRAPHICAL FICTION.

PANEGYRIC—

An elaborate type of eulogy of a person or of an act, characterized by very high praise.

PSYCHOGRAPHY—

A type of biography that presents essentially the spiritual history of the subject; interpretative biography dealing with the history of the mind of a person.

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